Magi-Nation: Infinite Loops Compilation

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The World-Tree/Computer thing is broken. And it's taking Ages for the Administrators to fix things. The solution? Put all universes into a state of repeating time. These are the Loops that never end, and we welcome you my friend. Come inside, where Magi-Nation (and crazy events) lie in store...

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To Start Things Off

To make a long story VERY short, Yggdrasil, the World Tree, ended up being catastrophically broken. To fix the great tree, each of its branches - separate worlds and universes - have been placed into Groundhog Day style Time Loops. However, there are a few catches.

1. The person who remembers all the resets is called an Anchor. Anchors make sure that their universes don't fall to pieces. Every world has an Anchor.

2. People who sporadically remember the resets - called Loops - are termed Loopers. There are a lot of these floating about. They are really strong.

, there are people who know of the loops but do not loop themselves - they are called Dreamers.

4. The people trying to fix Yggdrasil are mythological gods. Because Yggdrasil works like a computer, they are called Admins.

5. Certain events - Ascending to the Admin level, Crashing a Loop, Erasing entire universes - are considered very bad things.

6. Certain indviduals wish to enact said Very Bad Things. These are known as MLEs - Malicious Looping Entities.

7. Branches can occasionally intersect in odd ways; these are called Fused Loops.

8. EVERY LOOPER LEARNS HOW TO USE A **SUBSPACE POCKET** . SERIOUSLY, THOSE THINGS ARE **AWESOME** ! YOU CAN STORE ***EVERYTHING*** INSIDE IT! When it get's big enough, at least.

Well, that's it for the "Welcome to the Multiverse" Speech. Now, onward to snips!

- Magi-Nation (GBC) 1.1 -

Tavel Gorge, 5:32 PM. Tuesday. Month undisclosed, year unknown.

The first thing Tony found odd about the situation was being called "Foney Bones" again. The second thing odd was that he was outside the cave where he had found Furok's Animite. And the third thing odd was that despite all these things, he could still feel the energy he had gained from his travels in the Moonlands. The raw, unrelenting power of the Dreams that marked him as a Magi.

Just like before, Tony agreed to go into the cave to retrieve the crystal. Despite knowing what would happen because of it, a part of him desperately wanted to see all of his Eliwan friends again; wanted to pummel Agram into little bits of paste for what the Ancient had dared to do. And just like before, taking the Animite crystal resulted in the cave's collapse. He didn't run this time though. He knew what would happen if he did; knew that no matter how far he ran, he would just end up at a dead end. And so he fell, once again somehow traversing time and space to end up falling into the lake near Vash Naroom.

He didn't know whether to be happy or sad to see Korg and Zet again. The two bumbling Core Magi (or at least, one bumbling Core Magi and one smart-but-short Core Magi) didn't seem to notice that anything was wrong, didn't seem to notice that time had reset. Tony had to repress a grin. Maybe, just maybe, dealing with these two would be fun.

When Korg Summoned the Black Agovo, Tony debated whether to Summon Furok, or to use Leaf Cut on the offending Core Creature. The Leaf Cut won out, despite how close he was to Furok. The look on the Core Magi's face was well worth it, and fortunately less conspicuous than Summoning without a Ring.

Despite knowing his way around and despite being much stronger, it was with great relief that Tony noticed Eidon approaching. Gia's

student was always a welcome friend here. "Eidon, do you know what's happening? Time has somehow reset, Korg and Zet don't remember me (even though that makes sense), and I'm a lot stron-"

"EXPLODING SOCK PUPPET!"

Oh yeah, there was that. He'd forgotten all about that.

It was only after he defeated Agram that he started to wonder. Last time, he had found himself back at the cave after returning home. Hopefully this wouldn't be like some sort of Groundhog Day -

"Foney Bones is more like it!"

Loop. Of course it would be.

Here we go again.

- END SNIP -

- Magi-Nation GBC 1.2 -

"NO, Eidon! You think someone is Kyros every year! Let's see, who was it last year? Poad? What were you thinking?!" Tony heard Eidon mutter something about superhuman soup; he had heard Orwin's shouting match with Eidon a couple of times now, and while it had been awkward to listen in the first time, currently it just left a sour feeling in his stomach.

"And before that was Yaki! We couldn't shut him up for months! He went around shouting OOOH YEAH! I'M THE GREAT MAGUS KYROS! DIG IT! WOOO!"

Tony almost wished that it was the optimistic Magi who was Kyros. If only someone else had the burden instead, had to face Agram's ranting about destruction. Tony had tried to stay home once. He had tried to avoid being Agram's "key", the sole reason the Core Magi could create the awful Shadow Geysers. It had resulted in Core

energy radiating out of the Cave and corrupting everyone in Tavel Gorge.

If he couldn't prevent Agram's actions by avoidance, then by the Core he would make sure he was strong enough to stop Agram quickly.

"... must be the boy."

Orwin's words caught Tony's ear, and he shook himself from his reverie to "greet" the old Magi.

"Yes. Tony, I'd like you to meet Orwin, Elder of Vash Naroom."

Yes, stronger would definitely be good. Maybe this time he'd focus on Spell instead of relying on Dream Creatures. Relics wouldn't hurt either.

- END SNIP -

- Magi-Nation GBC 1.3 -

Tony couldn't fathom how - in his many, many trips around the cycle, this abomination had occurred. This loop seemed to have had everything replaced by pink fluffy unicorns. They were bridges and water and lips doing that flappy *fpthty* thing. There were also rainbows - lots of rainbows that became rain-posies. Water flowed in the sky and the bees seemed to have created a collision monarch opposing the doors.

"Core-take it! What in the world caused this - this - this - mess?!"

He spotted Yaki nearby, and was relieved to see that his friend was unaffected by what was going on. "Yaki, please tell me that everything is normal right now. Please!"

Yaki just grinned and then the grin went sideways into a mess of distorted colors and sounds. Through the Chaos Tony ran, though the only thing he could hear was a single word, repeated over and

over and over until Tony was afraid that would start glitching as well. Through it all Yaki just stared at him with soulless white eyes.

"One."

Didn't take long for him to find Pruitt. In retrospect however, it was probably for the best. She was twirling merrily to an UnSound, and as she danced, the floor started to become puddles everywhere and the world *twisted* - He caught a glimpse of her eyes - glowing white and soulless. Lips spilt further than they should and her voice was not her own. Tony didn't stick around to find out what was going on or who had spoken. He started heading for the city gates, hoping to avoid whatever this THING was.

"Two."

In his frantic dash to get away from whatever *it* was, Tony ran headlong into someone crossing the street. The earthling apologized profusely, trying to help the stranger stand.

The guy looked kind of Underneathien, even if his fungus-hair was coloured weird (Seriously? Purple and Turquoise? What was up with that?). The kid seemed to be clutching his head and in great pain. It was about then that Tony realized that everything had become shadows and reaching mushrooms and the street seemed longer than it should have been. Then it was as if reality *twisted again* and the kid's eyes were empty gleaming white and Tony ran once more from the rasping un-voice that followed him.

"Three."

Tony hadn't found anyone who was even remotely sane around town. Everything was somehow *wrong* and there was nothing he could do. All tony could rely on was himself, and even then it might not be enough. He was currently trapped inside a bathroom and - he glanced over at the toilet. Everything was sideways and the shadows where cackling at him from who knows where. Tony tried to gather his failing courage and glanced in the mirror behind him. His own

reflection stared back and began to laugh. An ugly, grating laugh that emerged from within Tony himself.

Hollow white eyes stared back at a mad, laughing boy with no clue about what was going on. Tony's lips split open in that manic grin and spoke a single word.

"Four."

All the world was white and Tony blinked a few times to get his bearings. As his vision adjusted, he noticed a rather... loosely dressed woman standing in front of a high school holding some pamphlets.

He stumbled over to her (and tried his best to avoid her highly endowed features) to try and get his bearings. "Hi, I seem to have gotten lost. Could you tell me where I am?"

She *smiled* at him like a cat cornering her prey. The voice she used to greet him was another warning bell; it was far too high pitched and *seductive* to belong to a normal person. "Hi! We're dedicated to serving your every need, and we hope that your stay will be a *very pleasant one.* **WELCOME TO EIKEN!"**

- END SNIP -

- Magi-Nation 1.3 - Admin Aftermath -

The message kept flashing irritatingly on Breksta's screen. The same message that had been playing for about an hour now. The one singular irritating message that signified that the-thrice-Nhiddhog-taken-stupid-love-spam goddess was at it again. By the time Thoth arrived (with a welcome cup of coffee), the ticked-off night goddess was trying to burn a hole in aforementioned spam.

"Am I correct in my present assumption that your most up-to-date endeavour to secure the terms and restrictions of the Magine Code concluded with Aphrodite conveying intrusive mail at an inopportune

moment?" Thoth handed her the cup of coffee (she preferred *Klah* when she could get it) and set a fairly substantial stack of papers next to his terminal. "You are aware that you may invoke paragraph 213 of section .2 of the *Proper Actions and Administration Etiquette Accord* ?"

Breksta glared at him over her coffee. "It's not just Eiken-Spam. Hermes knows we get enough of that stuff; I think he's been trying to contact IT in his spare time to handle it. No, the problem is that those Nhiddhog-Taken hackers infected the email with a virus. Said virus crashed the loop and sent my Anchor to Eiken!"

Thoth looked over to her from his terminal. "I surmise that your emotions are feeling rather affronted as of present?"

Breksta almost made to shatter her cup. "My duty is to protect those in my branches. Punishment is to be solely for misdeeds and improper conduct, not thrown about willy-nilly by a stupid virus!"

Thoth rolled his chair over to Breksta's station and opened up the code for the glitch. "Hmmm... This seems reminiscent of a malfunction Hephastus encountered in the Mega-Man Loop Branch pre-Crash. I would advocate transporting the data you have gathered to him; your twofold operation might be able to compose an alternative stratagem to better combat the virus's menace and inhibit it's further distribution."

Breksta sighed. "I know, it's just that I want to prove that I can handle whatever get's thrown my way."

Thoth smiled at her. "You have not yet accumulated the knowledge that every Admin is place in a postion where requesting assistance is not a negative prospect." He turned back to his own terminal. "I am afraid that my current situation requires me to monitor the most recent Baseline Expansion for my assigned branch. I hope that you will be able to eliminate your current dilemma post-haste."

Breksta glanced at the screen and the still-present horrendous cursive. It took a few tense minutes to delete the email and clean her terminal of the Virus, but it was worth it in the end. "I can always get revenge on Aphrodite later; maybe I'll take Thoth up on the *Regulations* thing. Right now, I have the Magining code to work on!"

- END SNIP -

- Magi-Nation 1.4 -

Tony sat dejectedly outside of Gia's cottage. He had hoped to come to the elderly Weave Magi for advice; had hoped that by some miracle she would know what to do. And after the past two loops - the horrible failings of the universe itself and that awful *thing* that pretended to be normal... he was at the end of his rope. He was unwilling to go home until this whole mess had sorted itself out, which meant that he had voluntarily isolated himself from his family. How many months - how many *years* had it been since he'd seen them? Some nights he felt like he couldn't take it; felt like he just wanted to scream or cry or do something to alleviate the horrible, lonely ache that was growing inside. But as of yet, he couldn't bear to go inside. He didn't dare tell Gia what was happening.

Gia watched the earthling silently from inside her hut. "Something is wrong with him, Eidon. The weight he bears inside... has he told you what it is?"

The Naroomi shook his head. "No. Like I said, I found him near the forest lake with a hunk of raw animite. He handled himself well against the two Shadow Magi that assailed him - Dreamed up a Furok from the hunk without any practice or training. I tried to introduce him to Orwin, but he refused to believe that the boy could be Kyros."

Gia propped her elbows up on the table and steepled her fingers. "And are you so sure that him being Kyros is a good thing?" Noticing her pupil's confused expression, she sighed. "The prophecy says that Kyros will appear during a time of destruction. What if Kyros is

meant to bring that destruction? What will you do then? Can you handle placing that burden - that horrible terror on his shoulders?"

Eidon's fingers traced a well-worn knot in the wood of the table as he contemplated his teacher's words. "I don't know. I certainly don't want to trouble him any more than he is, but I've spent so long believing that Kyros would bring salvation... I can't give up the hope that we'll get through all of this safely."

Gia smiled warmly and placed one wrinkled hand on top of his. "I'm sure we will. But even if he is our saviour, we can't rely on him to act alone. I cannot allow it – we all need each other in order to grow strong. Let the stronger grasses support the weak."

Eidon nodded. "I trust your wisdom." He glanced outside at the slumped red figure. "Do you want me to bring him inside?"

Gia stood up and made for the door. "It would certainly be rude of us to leave him out all night."

Tony had taken to plucking pieces of grass and flicking them everywhere. Despite his dejection, he was determined to defeat Agram as soon as possible. That, however, was dependant on the Shadow Magi creating the Geysers – and there was no telling how long that would take.

He was so distracted that he didn't notice Gia until the Weaver Elder was standing right behind him – and it gave him a bad fright.

"Aagh! Gia! What are you doing there; don't sneak up on me like that."

The Elder laughed. "The wind moves unnoticed by the grass; so do I move unnoticed by those of distracted thought. Please, come inside. Night will be here soon and we can't have you sleeping in the dirt, now can we?"

Tony blushed. "Thank you for offering; I'm sorry to be such a burden on you."

Gia placed her hands on her hips. "No talk of that; you're hardly a burden and we're more than happy to help you." Her gaze softened and she placed one hand on his shoulder. "No matter what troubles you, you only need to ask and we shall listen."

Tony couldn't help a few tears coming to his eyes. "I know, it's just – I don't know if you'd quite understand, or if you'd even know how to help."

Gia shook her head. "Sometimes the ability to help matters not. Sometimes all it takes is a friendly ear to listen and a caring shoulder to cry on."

Tony considered her offer. "Can I tell you after dinner? I'm kind of hungry right now."

This made Gia laugh again. "Of course. Come inside; I'm sure that we'll be able to scrounge something up."

After they had eaten, Tony told them everything. About how time was repeating itself, about what he had seen happen, and about Agram.

"That certainly explains a few things." Gia said. "You being Agadon's reincarnation in particular; Agram's hatred for the first Magi would be unparalleled, and of course he would ensure that the Geysers required the presence of his greatest enemy in order to activate." Noticing the Earthling's glum mood, she moved to comfort him. "It's not your fault in the slightest. That crotchety old ancient is the only one to blame in this situation; you just happened to have the bad luck to get mixed up in all of this."

Tony sighed. "I know. It still doesn't make things any easier to deal with though. He always gives me the speech; he promises to send me home if I don't fight him. Sometimes I'm tempted to accept, but… I can't help but worry about what will happen if I don't fight him."

Eidon nodded, his face grim. "And you can't exactly rely on us to handle things in your stead. From what you've said, it seems that we never remember like you do. I'm sure that if we did, then we could help to make things easier on you. And who knows? Maybe one day we will remember."

Tony brightened at that. "Do you really think so?"

Gia smiled. "Most certainly. It may be many, many years before we do, but I am most certain that one day we will take note of what is happening. Until that time, we can only move forward."

Eidon started as he realized something. "Tony, have you ever tried to take a different path?"

Tony frowned and grasped his chin in thought. "No, not really. I usually try to help Orwin as fast as possible – even try to stop him from entering the Geyser – but since Agram sometimes varies when he opens the Geysers and I usually have to act fast in order to prevent bad things from happening, I haven't had much time to try shaking things up. Why, what did you have in mind?"

Eidon smirked. "A resistance." He turned to his teacher and smiled. "Gia has often taught me that strength comes from co-operation; if you can somehow find a way to get each region to fight back while you're in the Geyser – and especially if you can find a way to extend the Core Glyph's protection to others – then you'll be able to at least relax a little. And when we remember, we'll be able to set it up on our own. It'll take some time to do efficiently, but we should eventually be able to let you relax a little with your family." The Naroomi Magi found himself the recipient of a sudden hug, the Earthling's tears soaking his brown robe. "It'll be okay, I promise. We'll find a way to make this work."

Gia nodded. "You shouldn't have to suffer this burden. If ever we can do something – even if we don't remember – please, don't hesitate to visit. We would be happy to help you no matter what."

Tony wiped his tears away on the sleeve of his hoodie. "Thank you, so much." He paused for a moment, and took a deep breath. "But what if something like last time happens?"

Both Magi were puzzled by that. "Last time?" Eidon asked. "What happened last time?"

Tony grimaced; he didn't like to think about it. "I arrived here no problem and everything was going okay until I visited Orwin. Then the world started to go nuts, and eventually it just sort of… glitched out and everything went white. When I came to, I was in this weird high-school place (high school is an Earth thing) where everybody wanted to… to…" Tony stopped speaking, desperately trying to forget what had happened. "Anyways, it was really bad. So what do I do if that sort of thing happens again?"

Gia frowned. "I suppose it depends on how badly the world 'glitches' as you put it. If it's not that bad, then find a way to roll with it. If not… come and see us the next possible time you can. If there's something we can do to help, then we will."

Eidon's smile returned. "But enough of that. This time around, you won't be going it alone. I don't care how many times I have to fight against that barrier, I *will* be joining you. You can count on that."

For the first time in ages, Tony felt content. And this time around, he was actually looking forward to stopping Agram. The future felt a little brighter.

- END SNIP -

So, that's it for Loops 1. Hopefully soon - Loops 2!

Prologue to Awakening, Parts 1-9

Here's the next part of the Magi-Nation Loops. This is part of a longer set, and it'll be a while before it's finished.

- Prologue to Awakening -

Part 1. To Reach for the Past

Time had wound back again almost two dozen times now, and Tony was once again heading to Pruitt the Ringsmith's shop in order to have his Furok Animite forged into a ring. The process was somewhat saddening, always knowing that he would never again see his very first Dream Creature. His Furok was a mighty, bear-like beast with branching antlers - and, unlike most Furoks, blue. His blue Furok. A Creature he had Magined himself, weaving it out of Dreams and into reality.

Tony paused mid-step as something occurred to him. All this time spent reliving the same days, and he hadn't once tried to learn the ancient art. It would certainly make his life much easier; no longer would he have to ransack the Shadowhold searching for the Cloud Frond!

Tony smiled, and resumed his journey with an eager spring in his step. Yes, this would prove to be a most useful skill indeed.

The skill itself, however, proved to be far more elusive than the concept. Tony was no longer a stranger to channeling Dream Energy; one of the benefits of all the repetition was that he seemed to keep up his level of strength despite the clock being turned back. Neither was he a stranger to Dreaming up a Creature any more, able to call upon his allies as skillfully as any Moonlands-born Magi.

The problem lay in the creation itself. No matter what he tried - be it a ring, a Relic (He only had an Archaic Leaf at the moment, but it counted) or even a Core-taken Baloo Root - he couldn't seem to find out a way to focus the energy needed to shape the Magined object. By now, all of his attempts were starting to take a toll on his Energy Levels; using the Focus skill and his various healing items simply weren't refreshing him as they should at the moment. He sighed and checked the sun's position; it hung low in the lavender sky, which itself was turning a deep mauve on the opposite horizon.

"Guess I'd better get to Poad's Inn." Tony picked himself up from where he'd been sitting and stretched his arms above his head. "I probably have a couple more days before the first Geyser erupts; hopefully I'll be able to Magine something substantial by then."

Tony made his way out of the square and headed for the southwestern corner of Vash Naroom; when he'd first visited the Moonlands, he'd gotten hopelessly lost. By now though, he'd spent a great deal of time learning how to navigate the winding pathways and the various secret corners. The Inn was always a welcome site, carved into the trunk of a great tree. Many of his friends could also be found there, and the establishment had become a meeting-house of sorts for the Naroomi people. It almost felt like home by now.

A filling meal later found Tony tucking into bed, ready for a hard-earned sleep. Tomorrow was a new day, and a chance to set things right.

In the darkness of the Glade, a tendril of Void magic began to seep out of the ground, hungry for the Life-Magic of Naroom's forest. The Shadow Geyser had begun to grow.

- END SNIP -

- Magi-Nation Loops - Prologue to Awakening -

Part 2. A Shadow of Disaster

Tony jerked awake to a horribly familiar shaking and stumbled out of bed to the window. It seemed that the Geyser plan had been implemented as quickly as possible, since he could see the horrible plume of dark energy shooting into the sky and blocking out the light of the grey-green planet above. The Earthling Magi didn't hesitate for a moment as he ran out the door, trying to keep his balance. It was the first time the Geyser had formed at night, and Tony could see various Magi coming out of their houses to stare at the horror that was growing in the Glade. No time to waste then; he was tired of Orwin always being hurt. Every single time, Orwin had tried to enter the Geyser and was struck ill by the vile magic of the Core.

Not this time. This time, Tony was closer to the Entrance of Vash Naroom. This time he could get to the glade before Orwin. He could make sure Korg and Zet weren't an issue (but then, the bumbling Korg never was an issue), and maybe, just maybe, prevent Orwin from trying to enter the Geyser. With these thoughts in mind, he made his way through the crowd to the city gates.

The Glade was pleasantly empty when Tony arrived. No Korg, no Zet and best of all, no Orwin. Hesitantly, Tony approached the accursed gate to the Geyser. He had never tried to enter without the Core Glyph before; it might be that he would be as badly injured as the Elder.

He was about to place his hand on the barrier when it was snatched away. He turned around and found that it was not Orwin who had stopped him. "Yaki! What are you doing here?"

The Trainer's face was grim. "Stopping you from making a pretty big mistake, oh yeah." He released Tony's hand and motioned for the Earthling to follow him. "I saw you running out of town and figure that you'd be headin' here. I followed you and saw you about to touch that thing - it's gotta be bad for your health, ya dig?"

Tony frowned and tried to avoid meeting the elder Magi's eyes. "I'm sorry. I just didn't want anyone else to be hurt."

Yaki raised an eyebrow at this. "Oh yeah? You must've had some harsh days back home to think that you can carry the burden alone. We'd stand a better chance together." He paused to vault over a fallen log, and smiled as he watched Tony try to do the same. "Orwin might know what that thing is, and if he doesn't, then the Great Library might hold some clues."

Tony had to admit that even though Yaki had an exuberant and energetic way of talking, the Trainer was a good friend to have around. And he did have a point about talking to Orwin... His eyes widened as a though occurred to him. The Great Library of Vash Naroom contained three thousand years of wisdom - knowledge from when true Magining was common place. Even if he couldn't change things right now, it just might be a good place to find the missing piece to his own Magining problem.

Tonight may have been sudden and shocking, but by no means uneventful. Now he just needed to survive Orwin's wrath.

- END SNIP -

- Magi-Nation Loops - Prologue to Awakening -

Part 3: Progress Made

By the time Tony and Yaki returned to Vash Naroom, the Earthling Magi's thoughts were anxiously flitting about over the possibilities of finding the answer to his Magining problem. All it would take was a few short hours in the Great Library - and it looked like Yaki had led him straight to Orwin's house while the boy was lost in thought. He entered the room - relieved, at least, to find that his actions this time had prevented the Elder's debilitating injuries.

Orwin did not share that relief. "What were you thinking! I specifically ordered you not to leave the village!" At this he spun on Yaki, who had already braced himself. "And you! Do you realize that if you'd been killed, we would have lost one of our greatest advantages? YOU ARE THE TRAINER FOR VASH NAROOM! IT IS YOUR JOB

TO MAKE SURE FUTURE GENERATIONS KNOW HOW TO FIGHT!"

Yaki stared steadfastly ahead. "I did what I had to do. Eidon asked me to train the kid earlier, and I look after those in my charge. Bottom line is, those I look after won't get hurt, ya dig?"

Orwin sighed and rubbed his brow wearily. "I should have known. Eidon may be a talented Magi, but I fear that his recklessness has rubbed off on the two of you. Tony, I understand that you want to go home, but that thing " - Here he gestured to the Geyser, visible in the distance through the window - "Is extremely dangerous, and it could have killed you." By this point, Orwin looked no longer like the Elder of Vash Naroom. He was instead a tired old man, with age, experience and the inability to use them properly. "It is a sight I wish I could have avoided seeing in my lifetime. That is a Shadow Geyser; it's comprised of pure void energy, and it will eventually corrupt all that dwells here. All life - plants, Dream Creatures and even Magi will fall victim to the evil that it spreads. And despite all that, there is one thing that is much worse than the side effects of the Geyser. They act as a signal - a beacon to call our ancient enemies into battle once more.

"The Invaders." Yaki's face was grim and tired - the face of countless battles lost and won. "If the Invaders come, then we're all done for. Agram will have won his sorry game at last."

Agram. The mere mention of the name caught Tony's attention. It was the name of his arch enemy; an Ancient Magi who believed that giving magical secrets to the supposedly "lesser" Eliwan was nothing less than treachery. The same Ancient who had betrayed his own kind three thousand years ago and had been imprisoned in the Core for his crimes by Agadon. And Agadon was either Tony himself's Ancestor, or pre-Incarnation. And for Yak to have mentioned Agram's name meant that the Trainer was hiding some secrets of his own. But for now, however...

"Orwin, I'm really sorry for disobeying your orders. But I was closest to the gates, so I figured that I would get there the fastest." Tony paused for a moment. "I guess... A part of me thought that the big current of obviously evil energy might get me back home."

Orwin smiled; it was a rare thing, since in all of the resets, Tony had never seen him do so. "I understand why you did it, but I do ask that you remain in Vash Naroom for a while longer. At the very least, I won't have you going out there untrained –" and here he turned back to Yaki " – And this time I want him FULLY TRAINED. None of your basics, boy."

Yaki smiled and snapped a salute to the Elder. "Yes sir! I'm totally diggin' what yer sayin'!

Orwin was about to turn away, when Tony realized his opportunity and spoke up. "Um, Orwin?" The old Magi glanced at Tony, and the Earthling couldn't tell if he was angry or serious. "Um, when I first arrived, Eidon mentioned something called Magining. He said I did it with my animite – before I turned it into a ring – and that he'd never seen anything like it. I've been trying hard to replicate what happened, but I'm having a lot of trouble. Would it be possible for me to go into the Great Library? You know, just in case they have a book on Magining in there."

Orwin looked at Tony in shock. His previous assumptions of the boy had been thrown completely out the window. "Eidon never mentioned Magining to me – perhaps because I wouldn't let him, but still! I hadn't guessed that you possessed such an Ancient ability! Tell me, what was it that you Magined?"

Tony rocked nervously on the balls of his feet. "It was only for a brief moment, but I summoned a blue bear-thing with antlers – Eidon called it a Furok, and said it was bigger than normal. When I had it made into a ring though, every time I try to call out that Blue Furok, it ends up being brown."

Orwin narrowed his eyebrows in thought. "Hmmm… Perhaps it's merely due to inexperience…. You certainly know very little about the Moonlands in addition…"

Although he only regarded the subject for a moment or two, those moments were tense and suspenseful. Tony was glad that his hoodie hid some of his sweat, and was definitely glad that it hid his quavering frame.

"I've made my decision, Boy." Orwin's voice startled the Earthling, even though he was expecting it. "You may indeed peruse the Great Library, but you must remain under guard at all times. No need to worry about learning to read – your translator bracelet will suffice. Yaki – " Here the Naroomi Magi stood at attention after trying to glance up the stairs into the Astronomy Chamber – "I want you to find Woot. He's probably the only Magi in Naroom who can possibly keep up with an energetic, near *suicidal* –" Here he glared at Tony "-and unpredictable person like Tony."

Yaki clasped one fist to his breast and bowed. "It shall be done Elder. Oh YEAH!"

Tony winced at Yaki's farewell. "Orwin, if I get good enough at Magining… do you think that I could cure that corruption you were talking about?"

Orwin placed on hand on Tony's shoulder and looked him in the eye. "Tony, that sort of Magining is extremely difficult and would take Eons to master. Considering that we want you to get home as soon as possible, I suspect that by journey's end, at most you'd be able to Magine a Baloo Root. Still, that shouldn't affect your ability to try… one of these days, you might just end up surprising me."

Tony watched as the Magi Elder slowly climbed the stairs to the observatory.

"One of these days, huh?" Tony didn't care if he had a bemused expression on his face or not. *"From what it looks like, I pretty much*

have eternity on my side. And for those times when I can't stop you, I'll eventually be able to save you fast enough that "one of these days" is going to be "pretty darn quick" from your perspective."

Tony glanced up the stairs one last time, and then strode out the door to head for the town square. It was the most likely place to meet up with Yaki and this Woot fellow. And besides, he had a few questions for the Trainer to answer.

- END PART 3 -

- Magi-Nation Loops - Prologue to Awakening -

Part 4: Two Heads, One Problem

The next few days dawned grey and gloomy, with the Geyser's miasma pervading all of Naroom. Tony had never remained in Vash Naroom when the Geyser erupted before; he had always been sent away to see Gia as soon as possible. And thus he had never before experienced the full power of the Geyser. His heart felt heavy and his body was like lead; each movement seemed to take an eternity to complete. Beneath it all was a subtle whisper; a sick attraction to the Geyser that repulsed him to his core.

Slipping out of his bed, Tony tossed on a spare set of clothes that Yaki had lent him. The Naroomi-made garments were autumn colored and surprisingly comfortable; he was certain that when time ceased its many repetitions, he would hardly be the same person as before.

That made him think of something that he had noticed while perusing the library. Yaki was occasionally asked to watch him instead of Woot, and the elder Magi seemed more battle-worn than other times. His movements were silent and often went unnoticed, while his eyes darted about and kept watch on the shadows. Tony was certain that it had something to do with the mention of Agram in Orwin's house that first night. No Magi should know about Agram yet, and the fact that Yaki did was telling.

Tony splashed some water onto his face from a washbasin near his bed, gave his hair a quick brush and then started down the stairs to the Inn's main lobby.

"I'm telling you, he's not that sort of person!"

The voice startled Tony. Rushing downstairs, he almost ran headlong into Woot. The wild blonde Magi waved a hand for him to be silent, and Tony peered out into the lobby.

Pruitt was arguing with Tryn about something; the Ringsmith's face was bright red and there were tears in her eyes, while Tryn was glaring at Pruitt with her hands on her hips.

"Look, I know how much you care about him, but you have to admit that he has been acting rather strangely of late. You have to have noticed – he has the stench of the Core about him!"

Pruitt was firm in her resolve. "I don't care. I know that Yaki's still a good person, no matter what he's gone through. I refuse to believe that he could become a Shadow Magi so easily! What I don't understand is why you're willing to throw him under the Carillion's feet without a second thought!"

Tony jumped at the mention of Yaki having the aura of a Shadow Magi. It would certainly explain some of the Trainer's behaviours, but still… Pruitt was right. Yaki didn't act like a Shadow Magi at all. Sneaking away from Woot and the others, he went back to his room and slipped out the window. Yaki was the only one who could answer this dilemma.

Tony found the blonde Magi in the Geyser grove. It was far gone from how he'd seen it before; the plant life was withering and black; the air was still and devoid of all sound except the rushing of the Gesyer.

Yaki was staring at the evil font; his expression was blank and Tony couldn't tell what he was thinking. But one thing was clear – while

Tony himself felt slowed and sickened by the Geyser, Yaki was acting as if it didn't affect him at all.

"Yaki?" Tony's voice quavered a little. Now that he was here – despite trusting the Trainer – he felt nervous, and couldn't predict what would happen.

"Just under two dozen." Yaki's voice was rougher than it had been, and Tony could now clearly see a glint of red in the Magi's green eyes. "That was what you were going to ask, wasn't it. You were going to ask me how many times it's been now."

Tony's heart jumped. "You mean… it's happening for you too? Time is repeating?"

Yaki turned to face the Earthling and nodded. "Yeah. I have to say though, this is the first time it's happened so early." His face was worn and pained; although it was hard to tell, the Geyser had clearly affected him badly.

Tony was certain that his gulp had been audible; what could have happened to turn the care-free Trainer into such a hardened warrior? "Not for me; I always start just before I come to the Moonlands, and it ends when I leave. You…"

Yaki sighed and sat on the blackened grass. "I start when you leave. Tony… I wish I didn't have to tell you this, because I know it's going to hurt." The Magi's eyes were sad and distant, the memories weighing heavy upon him. "The Dark Twins invade Naroom. They ransack the Great Library, and I'm always cursed to use Void energy." He ignored Tony's gasp of horror and continued. "Evu is corrupted inside this Geyser, and he joins Agram. Korg takes over Bograth and declares war on Paradwyn; the Weave is hit almost as bad as Naroom, and the Cald declares war on Orothe and the Weave. I don't know much about Kybar's Teeth, the Underneath or D'resh. Nar, at least, aids Naroom in battle. The war has taken such a toll on all of us… And last time, I received a message from

Shimmer informing me that one of the Invaders had made it past the Dream Barrier. I don't know how many other times that's happened."

Tony felt sick to his stomach, and he knew that the Geyser wasn't to blame. "Is it my fault? Is it because I stopped Agram? Because I left?"

Yaki looked at Tony, and the Earthling could tell that the Trainer was struggling to avoid drawing on the potent Void energy inside the Geyser. "Yes, but only because the Dark Twins were trying to fill the gap in power. Warrada in particular is extremely cunning; I know for a fact that after getting what she wants in the Library, she's willing to use it on her own brother."

Tony didn't know whether to punch a tree, Yaki or what. "So then nothing I do matters. If I stop the Geysers, the Moonlands end up in a big war. If I don't, they become sick, corrupted and rip for these "Invaders" you mentioned to pick. Is there anything I can do? You know, besides killing Warrada?"

Yaki moved so fast, Tony could barely blink, let alone react. One moment he was sitting on the ground, and the next he was staring Tony in the eye, his expression furious. "No. No killing. You may not know this, Tony, but Moonlanders DO NOT KILL. I saw one group kill a Shadow Magi – several times by now, might I add – and each time they've felt awful about it. And I've nearly killed Warrada myself – it may have been due to the Void magic, but it was still me. Do you know how awful it feels?"

Tony backed away from the angry Magi and tried to compose himself. "And I'm guessing that the Void energy doesn't just go away when time restarts, does it? I know that my magical strength sort of … builds, whenever it happens. I guess… It's like over one cycle I build a cake, and during the next cycle I build another cake and I stack the new one on top of the old one. Does that happen with your… um… issue?"

Yaki nodded. "Oh yeah. I've gotten better at supressing the hunger since there's not a lot of it around during my set, but here – now – with the Geyser, it's unbearable. I can't *stop* feeding this time, and I can't really control it."

Tony blinked, and remembered what had inspired him to come find Yaki in the first place. "I ran into Tryn this morning; it seems like everyone in Vash Naroom has noticed your Core energy. Pruitt's been trying to stand up for you, but I don't think it'll be long before other people become suspicious."

Yaki's heart lifted at that. "Pruitt is supporting me? Even though she knows the dangers? I know that she isn't aware like us, but still… to know she's got my back – that'll be a big help."

Tony smiled. "I'll bet. How about we head back into town? We could both probably use some grub." He rubbed the back of his head sheepishly. "Well, that and I kind of ran off on Woot this morning. He'll *probably* be kind of mad at me."

Yaki dusted himself off and looked back at the Geyser one more time. "Yeah, you're probably right. Just letting you know now though; I don't eat as much as I used to. It's a side effect of the whole Core thing." He paused and glanced at Tony. "One question – how are we supposed to explain my Core aura to everyone back in town?"

"So, you ran off because you were worried about Yaki." Woot's serious voice was not to be taken lightly. "And you found him trying to stop the Geyser's corruption from spreading." Tony smiled and nodded. Everything could be solved by smiling and nodding. Actually, he might have to try that out one of these cycles… "And now, of course, Yaki stenches of Core magic." The wasperine-loving Magi massaged his forehead and sighed. "That still doesn't explain why he's so Core-taken HUNGRY!"

Yaki had, so far, drunk 5 pints of Poad's best ale, several roasted weebos, and was currently munching on a salad.

Tony shrugged. "All he told me was that the Core made him hungry; I figured that this was what he meant."

Woot just shook his head and groaned. "Look, just stay in your room tonight. I figure that otherwise, you'll just end up causing trouble without me."

That night, Yaki snuck up to Tony's window. The earthling Magi stumbled out of bed and opened it, letting the Core Stalker (that was his title, apparently) into his room.

Tony closed the window and turned to face the elder Magi. "So what are we going to do next? I'll be happy stay and help you with the Battle –"

Yaki held up a hand and cut him off. "I have a better idea. " He rummaged around in a satchel he was carrying and produced a book. "I went through the Library again, and I managed to find this." He held it out and Tony took it from him. "It's the most comprehensive guide to Magining I could find. I know that you wanted to work on that skill right now…"

Tony glanced at the author, and then raised a quizzical eyebrow at his friend. "You do realize that AGRAM wrote this book, don't you?"

The Core Stalker nodded. "Oh yeah, I know. I gave it a look-over before I brought it, and it seems like it was written before Agram went crazier than a Quanjel. The guy's got an ego sure, and he might mention secret allies once or twice… but overall, he was the best Maginer of his time. Nobody's been able to match him since." Yaki grinned. "I know you're gonna try it out, dude. Just remember – stick with the basics, ya dig?"

Tony grinned back. It would certainly be fun to defeat Agram using powers Tony had learned from the old sorcerer's book… "I think that we're going to totally rock this. In fact, when I get good enough, I'll make sure to Magine some defenses for you to use later."

Yaki placed a hand on the younger Magi's shoulder. "And as I am now, I'll be able to enter the Geyser with you. I promise that at least this time, you won't have to do it alone."

Tony hugged the blonde Magi tightly. "Thanks. You don't know how much that means to me."

Yaki was set off balance for a moment, but recovered quickly and hugged Tony back. "Any time you need me bro, any time. You can definitely count on it! Oh Yeah!"

- END PART 4 -

- Magi-Nation Loops - Prologue to Awakening -

Part 5: Advent of Darkness

Yaki had left to patrol the outskirts several hours ago, and Woot was currently posted outside of Tony's room at the Inn. While Tony didn't mind the daredevil Naroomi's company, he was starting to worry about the Geyser. The only way to stop it was with the Core Stone. And the only way to get the Core Stone was to enter the Geyser. The problem was that in order to get into the Geyser, he needed to visit Gia's house in The Weave.

And there was no way that Orwin would let Tony go to The Weave with Naroom in its current condition.

Tony sighed and massaged his temples. He had been scouring the book on Magining for hours now, and there was still nothing he had found that could help him. That wasn't to say that there was nothing there; it was simply that Agram had the tendency to ramble in his writings, and finding the relevant information was proving to be more difficult than he had anticipated.

Tony closed the book and got into bed, pulling the covers tight. What if he couldn't figure this out? And how long before Agram activated the Geyser in the Underneath? Had it already opened?

These thoughts swirled about in his tired head until he finally fell asleep.

The next day found him poring over the text again, searching for any hint on how to Magine. A few times he had almost thought he'd had it, but it had turned out to be tips for an advanced Maginer and not basics for the beginner.

Tony was becoming increasingly frustrated with his progress. He didn't know whether it was the Geyser, or if it was his own emotions getting the better of him. He was almost about to give up for the day when a line of text scribbled in the margin caught his eye. It was hastily written and looked like the author had added it in the spur of the moment.

- Blank crystals – good for focus. Infused don't work – why? -

This was it. This had to be the key to Magining that he had been missing all along. And of course, it had to be ridiculously simple. He couldn't tell if the Animite he had found in the cave was blank or not, but it stood to reason that the Dream Creature's energy signature in an infused piece would naturally block any new patterns from forming.

It also had to be the only object in his inventory that he hadn't tried that first day. Taking a deep breath, Tony pulled a crystal out of his wallet and focused. Slowly and hesitantly, the wavering form of a Baloo Root flickered in and out of view. Breathing rhythmically, he let it fade before trying again. This time he was more confident in his attempt. He was used to Dreaming up Creatures, and this would be no different with enough practice.

The second time was far more effective. The Baloo Root burst into being with a flash of light and sound, a few wisps of Dream Energy still radiating off of it. Tony picked it up gingerly, almost afraid that it would be hot to the touch. And yet, it felt like any other Baloo Root.

Dazed by his success, Tony decided to try Magining up a Cloud Frond, just to make sure he could. He had the Animite in his hand and was focusing his energy when Woot burst into his room. Startled, the Cloud Frond dissipated and ceased to be. The Naroomi's eyes flicked to the area where it had been briefly, before focusing on Tony again.

"Orwin has requested that I take you to Gia's house; it isn't safe for you to be here right now." Woot's voice was uncharacteristically clipped and terse; Tony could see that the Magi was tense and evaluating every possible exit.

"What happened? What's wrong?" Tony was worried. If another Geyser had opened up, it would most certainly mean that he had to speed things up.

Woot moved quickly to the dresser where the Earthling Magi had been keeping his personal effects, and started to move them into a haversack he'd brought with him. "Evu went into the Geyser. Tryn followed him, as did Barak – leader of the Cald. Orwin believes that they will be corrupted into Shadow Magi, and that we don't have much time." He turned to Tony and all but shoved the bag into the boy's arms. "All of Vash Naroom is evacuating; we aren't the only ones leaving."

Tony was floored. Certainly Yaki had told him about what happened, but now… it was the first time he had experienced it for himself, and he felt guilty about letting it happen. If he had only left when he was supposed to instead of learning a lost art – would it have changed anything? Would he have been able to move fast enough to prevent anyone from entering the Geyser, and avoided this whole mess?

Tony shook his head to clear away the thoughts, and followed Woot out of the Inn. Yaki and Pruitt were waiting for them, each with their own sack. Pruitt's eyes were red with dried tears, and Yaki's skin had turned ashen from the saturation of Void Energy that pervaded all of Naroom. The Core Stalker placed one hand on Tony's shoulder to comfort him, and then wordlessly turned and headed for the exit.

Pruitt smiled despite her worn face and followed him; Woot hiked his own haversack up his shoulder and moved forward determinedly. Tony glanced back at the Inn just once – back at Poad loading food and other supplies into the arms of waiting villagers, back at the place that had become a second home to him – and set off after them, into the black and withered forest; forward into what was now the unknown.

- END PART 5 -

- Magi Nation (GBC) Loops - Prologue to Awakening -

Part 6: Twists and Turns

Tony sighed and his haversack higher onto his back. While they had safely made it out of Naroom a few hours ago, the journey to The Weave was still taking a while. Hostile Dream Creatures were appearing left and right, and the constant battles were taking their toll on Tony and Yaki both. While Pruitt and Woot had helped fight when the group first left the forest, they had been unable to compete with the strength that their companions had gained over the many repetitions.

Stretching his arms as far as he could, he smiled at the sight of smoke rising in the distance. Soon they would be at Gia's cottage, he could get the Core Glyph and all would be well. Soon he would be able to start fixing things.

Yaki glanced at Tony. During the journey, the Earthling Magi had proved to be much stronger than anticipated. Relics, Spells – even his ability to command Dream-Creatures had become nearly flawless due to the strangeness of time. In comparison, his own skills had grown duller. Whether it was the Void Energy or his own lack of practice, he was certain that Tony would probably surpass him one of these days.

It was with weary feet and heavy hearts that they arrived at Gia's cottage. While Tony helped Pruitt with her bag, Woot went over to

the door to inform the Weave Magi of their arrival.

"And who are you supposed to be?" Tony looked over to the cottage and saw Woot standing defensively in front of a strange, blue-haired Magi in red robes. Woot growled and raised his fists, a ring glittering dangerously on his finger. "You're not Gia. Where is she? And why are you here?"

The strange Magi said nothing, but stared oddly at Tony. Something in the cottage rustled, and he stepped aside as Gia came out, wiping her hands with a rag.

"I'm glad to see all of you finally made it. I'm sorry about my guest; he rarely visits anyone, so I'm afraid he's a little repressed." She strode over to where Tony was, took his haversack and hoisted it over her shoulder. "Well, let's not waste any time. Everyone, come in and put your feet up for a moment. The journey from Vash Naroom must have been a hard one."

Grateful to see that the elderly Magi was still alive and well, Tony followed her inside, pausing only briefly to glance at her mysterious guest. He seemed somehow familiar, and his golden eyes were sharp and calculating. Deciding it could wait until later, Tony found a chair near the fire and sat down. He was asleep within minutes, his bones craving a rest that had been sorely needed.

He awoke several hours later to a quiet house. The only noise came from the fire and a pot of soup that had been hung over the flames. Gia was nowhere to be seen, and the three Naroomi were sleeping soundly in whatever corner they had been able to find. Even Yaki – who no longer needed much sleep - was caught up in slumberland.

Tony rose to his feet quietly, not wishing to disturb the sleepers, and headed for the door. He needed to talk to Gia, had to find a way to fix everything – or at least to make sure that the world didn't end up destroyed like that one time.

"Gia's in the garden, if you're looking for her."

The stranger's voice made Tony start, and the Earthling's first reaction was to reach for his Furok ring. "Don't do that! You nearly gave me a heart attack!"

The stranger laughed, and emerged from a shadowed wall near the hearth. "You survived. But like I said, if you're looking for Gia, she's in the garden. Probably getting something for dinner, I'd imagine."

Tony relaxed a little, but something about this guy… in a way, he almost didn't feel *natural* . "So, who exactly are you? I know that the others probably grilled you already, but I don't know who you are and that bugs me."

The stranger shrugged. "You've got fair reason to. With the world in the state that it is, you can't exactly trust everyone you run into. But as for who I am, my name is Rayje. I doubt you've heard of me, but I can assure you that I have no intention of being your enemy."

Tony had to admit that the mysterious Magi was right – to a point – but still… "Sorry if I'm a little on edge, but something about you just –"

"- rubs you the wrong way, right?" Rayje grinned – it was a catlike grin, entirely predatory. "Yeah, I can see why that would be the case. But as for why… well, I may get to that in time. Or I may never tell you. It depends."

This just made Tony curious. "It depends on what? Your mood?"

Rayje headed for the door and looked back only once. "On whether or not I decide to trust you."

- END PART 6 -

- Magi-Nation: Prologue to Awakening, Part 7 -

Part 7: Decisions Made

After a filling meal that night, Tony had fallen asleep to the gentle sound of the grass whispering outside. Yaki and Woot took turns keeping watch, and the mysterious Rayje sat by the fire, staring deep into the flames.

" *Such a strange place the Moonlands have become. They are nothing like El, nor like my island home."* He sighed, and gave the fire a poke. *"I wonder… will these people be able to weather the coming storm? Will they be able to withstand Agram's might? He has wrought such destruction…"*

Yaki sat on the roof, watching the light of the planet above and silently trying to grasp the Void energies that lay in Naroom. A part of him desperately wanted to be free of the hunger that had consumed him for so long; a hunger that, by now, was an intrinsic part of him.

And Tony… Tony had grown so strong. To have sought out the ancient art of Magining, he was either bored or desperate. But now – knowing what would become of the Moonlands when he left – what choices would he make? Would he do everything he could to prevent the war? Would he choose to stay and fight? Or would he place his trust in the Core Stalker and his allies?

On a whim, Yaki rose to his feet and closed his eyes. Maybe… it might not have to be *Void* energy. Doubtless it would always be a part of him, but there were twelve other regions – twelve other energies – out there waiting. And it was a specific one that the Core Stalker was reaching for.

A few tense moments went by, and Yaki could hear his heart beating furiously. At first, all he could feel from Naroom was the darkness. But slowly – surely – he became aware of a sensation akin to birdsong. Sudden and piercing, it warbled faintly, almost desperate and relieved to have found him. Standing on the edge – between Darkness and Birdsong, Yaki jumped into the pool of green that had opened before him –

And became the Forest. Became every root, every tree, every branch. He was the magic of the forest – of life and sunlight and growth. Of fresh earth and new buds and green leaves reaching for the warm summer sky. And he was large – larger than he had been, Every living thing that walked or crawled or flew or buzzed – he was all of these and he surrounded all of them.

Gasping, he pulled himself back from the shimmering green and back to the roof of Gia's hut. The magic was far stronger than he had anticipated – far more vibrant and strong-willed than he'd remembered. Perhaps it was his change – perhaps accepting the magic of the Core had made him more in tune with other types of Magic. And if the Magic of the Forest was so much bigger, perhaps the Void was far more than Agram – or any Shadow Magi – could have anticipated. It was risky, but… to abandon such a prospect would be folly.

Taking a deep breath, he reached out once again. The hunger was easier to find – more enticing – but this time the Birdsong and Green lay just beneath the surface, waiting to be released. Once again at the edge of Darkness, he jumped in.

He was as shadow, silent – cunning – swift, and he was all places dark. Every stair steeped in gloom and every corner where ideas turned and fortunes changed hands every hour. He was every grim plot, every foul deed and dirty back-alley-dealing. He was the sky. He was the shadow of El, watching the Moonlands from afar, and gazing down at the pitiable invaders that scrapped through ruined cities and desperately avoided touching the wasted ground below. He was the dark, cool places beneath the earth, the shadowy mountain roots. The birdsong warbled back at him; he was the cool shade beneath the trees, and the dark and mysterious forest heart. Darkness was so many things…

That had NOT been what he was expecting. He had anticipated a sick, corrupting touch that blackened the world and oozed through the Moon's core… but this was pure. The Darkness of the Core…

what he had touched was uncorrupted by Agram's touch. There had been some vile deeds certainly, but there had also been sorrow and wonder. It was no wonder why Agram had turned to such magic.

But there was still the knife-edge to walk. If he could master the darkness – a tall order, and one he would need every ounce of time to accomplish – then he might be able to fix what Agram had broken.

Yaki paused a moment, considering his options. And then he looked at his hands, smiling. It seemed that he'd made the choice long, long ago; when he had first tasted the Darkness and chosen to wield the Void instead of letting it destroy him.

It might take forever, and no doubt he would fall more than a few times along the way. But this was the path he had chosen. The Dark Hunger and The Green Birdsong; both would be his power, and his strength to support others. If Tony would master one of the Arts that Agram had forsaken, then Yaki would master the other.

But for now, he was content to watch the stars and the woods below, relishing in his choice to be a part of both.

- END PART 7 -

- Magi-Nation: Prologue to Awakening -

Part 8: Conversational Asides

Tony awoke the next morning feeling more refreshed and relaxed than he had in several days. Perhaps it was the lack of Void Energy pressing down on him, but even his energy levels felt higher than they had before. He could hear someone bustling about in the kitchen, and a delicious smell wafted down the halls. Tony's stomach growled, and he reluctantly left his warm bed and headed for the dining room.

He found everyone save for Gia seated at the main table, and even Yaki was eagerly devouring a bowl of porridge. "You seem in good

spirits this morning."

Yaki nodded. "Yeah! I did some soul-searching last night, and I think it really helped. I'm feeling a ton better now, ya dig?"

Pruitt giggled. "You even sound like your old self. I'm glad to see that you're back to normal, Yaki." She laid her head on his shoulder, and sighed contentedly. "You smell like the forest again."

Tony took a seat and accepted a bowl of mushy oats from Rayje. "So besides trying to figure out how to deal with the geyser – and how to heal Naroom – does anybody have an idea of what we should do today?"

Rayje took a moment to swallow his breakfast, washing the porridge down with a swig of ale. "For one thing, we're going to work on your Magining skills. Yaki mentioned your progress to Gia, and I at least feel that mastering such a skill would prove vital."

Tony glanced at Yaki curiously. "Just to be clear, I'm guessing you told her after I fell asleep yesterday?"

Yaki nodded, engrossed in his breakfast and trying to eat with one arm – Pruitt having occupied the other. "Yup. It's a rare skill, and Gia's one of the smartest Magi you could ever meet. I figured that she'd have a trick or two to teach you."

Woot drained his mug and wiped his hand on his sleeve. "Speaking of, has anybody seen Gia around? She wasn't here when I got up this morning."

"She's likely worried about her student." Rayje stood up from the table and carried his bowl over to the wash bin. "He didn't arrive with you, and he hasn't been here since I arrived a week ago."

Tony looked at his porridge, his heart heavy and a frown on his face. "Eidon… I haven't seen him in a while myself. I hope he's okay."

The entire table was silent for a moment, the only sounds coming from Rayje cleaning up. Fed up with the silence, Yaki stood up abruptly. "Well, we can't stand around moping. All we can do right now is move forward and find a way to help those who've been touched by Agram's corrupted magic."

The shattering of a plate caught everyone's ear. Tony turned – startled by the sharp sound – and saw Rayje fumbling for the pieces. "Are you okay?'

Rayje nodded, trying not to get cut. "I am fine. Yaki merely caught me by surprise; I'd thought that all knowledge of Agram had faded from the minds of the Eliwan. Few Magi even remember that he exists."

Yaki shrugged. "I found a book he wrote on Magining; the guy interested me, so I looked him up in the Great Library. I didn't exactly like what I found though."

Rayje paused and glanced at Tony. "You are learning Magining… from a book Agram wrote?"

Tony nodded. "The guy may be a nasty piece of work, but I have to admit that he knows his stuff. Neither of us were able to find anything else on Magining – just his works – and they're really detailed."

Rayje allowed himself a small smile. "Agram was the best Maginer of all the Ancients. His skill was so great that he even created new life, long before the Moonlands came to be."

Something inside Tony clicked, and a piece of the puzzle fell into place. "He created you. That's why you make me so uneasy – you sound like Agram, and I'm willing to bet that you look just like him." Tony swallowed. It was hard to say such things and not sound like he was accusing the elder Magi. "I'm not trying to offend you, it's just that…"

Woot spoke up, voicing Tony's thoughts. "Figuring out that you're related to the guy who ruined our lives is kind of sudden." He grinned. "Though it does make me think… If my Wasperines can beat you in a Magi Duel, could they beat this Agram guy? I'm getting fired up just thinking about it!"

Rayje's smile turned into a predatory grin. "I've been around for far longer than any Magi could ever dream of. I've seen battles that would make your Wasperines seem dismal in comparison. But I'd be happy to teach you a thing or two – it might help you on the road ahead."

Tony groaned. Of all things, a single comment had turned the small house into a battlefield. "At least take it outside. I don't want to be the one to explain to Gia exactly what we did to her house."

- END PART 8 -

- Magi-Nation – Prologue to Awakening -

Part 9 – The Path of Conflict

The small group of Magi – consisting of Tony, Yaki, Pruitt, Woot and Rayje – relocated to the outskirts of Gia's property; near enough that they could still see the house, but far enough that they wouldn't cause too much damage. Pruitt, however, seemed to have forgotten something and quickly ran back to Gia's cottage.

Tony's stomach twisted with unease, and he moved carefully until he was next to Yaki. "So how are they going to go about this? Are there special rules, or is it just like battling Salafy?"

Yaki shook his head, concern etched on his brow. "I'm not sure why, but… it seems that during this repeat, Magi-Duels are very formal events. Each must only use three Creatures, Relics and Spells. Creatures and Spells may be used at any point so long as you have the energy, but Relics are a one-time thing."

His face became grim, and his eyes began to gleam with an eerie green light. "Though I am interested in seeing how this pans out; the similarities, and the differences to our normal world."

Tony nodded, then focused back on the two Magi about to engage in combat. Rayje had taken up the northern position, and Woot had taken the south. Pruitt ran out of the house and stood roughly betwixt both Magi, holding a small wooden horn. Taking a deep breath, she blew into the horn with all her might.

Both Magi leapt backwards, drawing on as much energy as they could to fortify themselves for the fight ahead. For a moment the mood was tense – who would be the first to act, and how?

Woot was the first to move. In a moment, he had called forth 2 Wasperine Stalkers and a single Wasperine; both Stalkers seemed to catch Rayje's scent and bolted forward, each getting a good attack in before the older Magi had time to summon something.

Staggering backwards from the force of the blow, Rayje raised one hand high over his head, and a piercing cry echoed from the Dream Plane. A magnificent Monarch Hyren shimmered into view, though it seemed that the mere act of calling on it had worn greatly on Rayje. Despite the setback, he still bore a confident grin on his face.

Breathing in deeply, Rayje let the energy around him replenish what he had lost. It wasn't much, but moving forward, any little bit would help.

"My hyrens have *nothing* on that thing." Yaki stared up at the mythical beast Rayje had called out with awe; to see a Monarch Hyren was a rare sight indeed.

Rayje retook his footing, and with one gesture commanded his Hyren to attack the three Wasperines that the energetic Magi had summoned. "Not a bad move at all, but whether or not you attack first means nothing!"

Woot grimaced as one of his Wasperine Stalkers was crushed under the Hyren's paw, and felt its energy dissipate. "You may have gotten one of my Wasperines, but you can't crush all of them at once. Not even your mighty Hyren is that strong!"

Rayje brushed the boasts aside. "And yet, I have not finished." With a few words hastily muttered and the giving of his energy, Rayje cast two spells. "First, I'd like to introduce you to the spell Undertow. This Orothian Magic sends one of your creatures back to the Dream Plane. My target is your Wasperine!"

Woot watched in horror as his wasperine – his beloved Waspy – dissipated into energy. "And let me guess – you've got one more thing coming, don't you!"

Rayje nodded. "My second spell comes from the Cald – Fireball. While it can't fully dissipate your second Stalker, it won't stand much of a chance for long." A scorching sphere of heat proved his point; the Stalker seemed too weak to stand by now.

Frustrated by this strange legend, Woot reached out with his spirit for more energy. "And you, of all people, should know strategy when you see it!" With a flourish of his hand and his rings glinting in the sun, Woot called back the Wasperine and Wasperine Stalker that he had lost.

"And if you can use spells, so can I. I'll start with Overgrowth – This baby will allow one of my Wasperines – I'll choose my weakest Stalker – to gain the Focus skill. I'll also use a Sap of Life spell on it – to fully restore it to health." The Stalker sighed as the magic infused it, making it stronger. "Lastly, I'll cast Crushing Roots on your Hyren!"

Rayje flinched as his Hyren was seized by the colossal roots that sprang from the ground. "If that's all you have for me, then you've lost this fight." Breathing deep, Rayje drew on the life of the world around him. Glancing at his Hyren, he begged it silently to hold out just a bit longer.

Woot's eager expression turned uneasy. If the elder magi wasn't going to do something, then he was probably saving up his energy for something big. Better to attack now and get things over with, before he had time to try something.

Settling his stance and energy, he felt a ripple of excitement from his lead Stalker – time to go. Moving quickly, he cast a quick Overgrowth on his second Stalker – while it wouldn't kick in now, the effects later would prove useful.

"Waspy, target the Hyren. I'm gonna back you up." With a roar, Woot cast another Crushing Roots. The roots reach up, up high – and promptly retreated whence they came. Woot glared at Rayje, who was holding a golden gem aloft.

"Nice Try, but my Tomorrow's Jewel will cancel out that Crushing Roots of yours. I wouldn't want a repeat performance." Rayje's grin was massive. "There's always a different way of looking at things."

Woot 's smile fractured into a full-blown grin. "And I did." He gestured at Waspy and the two stalkers, waiting on the battlefield. Waspy struck the Hyren once, followed by the second Stalker. Their combined might proved to be too much for the Creature, and it faded back to the Dream Plane.

The second Stalker charged at Rayje. One glance at the Dream Creature was all it took; he had no energy left with which to defend himself. "I cede. The victory is yours; my playing it safe was nothing against your full-force attack." Rayje sighed, and his face grew grim. "Do not think that a single victory means that you can face Agram. He is far more cunning than I, and far stronger."

The Magined Magi placed one hand on Woot's shoulder. "I want you to take this lesson with though on your journey – expect *everything* . Sometimes it pays to charge in, other times it is far better to be defensive. And while Relics, Spells and Creatures are all menacing in their own right, your own mind is by far the most dangerous enemy you will ever face."

- END PART 9 -

Prologue to Awakening, Parts 10-13

I have to say, I'm really impressed that this compilation has gotten the number of views and followers that it has; Magi-Nation isn't that well known, so I'm glad that people are enjoying this.

Anyhoo, have the next part of Prologue to Awakening. I'm at a good point to shift gears now, so I'll be writing more snips with the Cartoon version as well as adding some of the shorter snips I've done in the past.

- Part 10: EXPLODING SOCK PUPPET! -

After both Rayje and Woot had finished cleaning up from their Duel, the group began to head back to Gia's cottage. Tony hung back, reluctant to join the others.

"Do you worry about Gia and Eidon? Or am I the cause of your distress?"

Tony glanced up to see that Rayje had fallen back to match Tony's pace. "I guess… it's a lot of things." Tony shrugged, and though he tried to put on a brave face, he simply wasn't able to. "And I'm worried about things in general. I mean, I just got here a month ago and now everything's gone crazy!"

Rayje paused, causing Tony to turn back to face him. "I think… I know a bit of how you feel." His eyes darted over the landscape, before settling on the wooden shed next to the house. "If you do not mind, could we talk somewhere private?"

Tony nodded, butterflies (or would they be a bunch of pliths?) tossing about in his stomach. "Sure. No problem."

Rayje laughed and strode over to the shed. "You need not be concerned – I understand your hesitation." Pushing open the door,

he gagged at the sawdust-filled musty air that poured out. "Blegh…"

Walking into the shed, the Earthling Magi glanced around for a place to sit; ultimately deciding that one of the woodpiles was clear enough to serve as a rest, he nonetheless brushed it with his sleeve to make sure that there were no spiders crawling about.

Taking a seat in front of Tony, Rayje took a deep breath, wisps of golden light glinting faintly as he replenished the Energy he had lost. "You fear me because I was created by Agram."

Tony bowed his head, occupying his eyes with a wood chip. "I'm sorry, I'm trying not to."

Rayje shook his head. "You have gifts that are rare among the Magi, and it makes you more sensitive to the flow of Energy as you become attuned to our world. It was only natural that you would sense Agram's presence; as I was created from his dreams, so too does a bit of his Energy linger within me."

Letting his eyes wander around the shed, Tony considered that. "So he really did Magine you? What was it like?"

Rayje wasn't sure whether to smile or to frown; the question was full of complex answers. "At that time… the Ancients still lived on the Homeworld of El, and did great things with their Magining. Great cities were constructed with a single thought, and travel between other worlds was done through the Dream Plane."

' *The Ancients were spacefarers? I didn't know that.'* Tony mused. "Okay, now you've *really* got my attention."

This made Rayje chuckle. "Indeed. Anyways, a woman – very beautiful, I am told – caught Agram's eye, and he was desperate to impress her. He tried everything; eventually, his desire to prove himself overwhelmed him. He vowed that he would create the greatest Magining ever – a living being."

The earthing whistled. "I read his book, so I know how good he was at Magining, but to go that far…"

Rayje nodded. "And he did. However, his negative emotions flowed into the Magining, and what emerged was not a life-form. It was a force of nature, full of anger and desire and envy."

Tony shivered, and wished that he was still wearing his hoodie. "Full of rage, right?"

The Magined Magi closed his eyes. "I was still new, and consumed by the darkness of my creator. I ravaged the city, and all that I destroyed was undreamed. Eventually I burnt out and was captured; my form settled from a nebulous thing of dreams into what you see now. Into the form of my creator."

Tony fell off the woodpile in shock, and grimaced as he hauled himself up. "I know that what you just said is serious, but… it's just that… that… Agram is green! And bald, and covered in all sorts of bandages, and has an eye in the middle of his chest… It's hard to think of Agram ever looking like you!"

Rayje started to snicker. "I will admit; to compare us now is quite hilarious." Picking up a nearby twig, he started to roll it in his fingers, a pensive look drifting across his face. "I awoke in a jail cell, held accountable for the destruction I had wrought. Agram would not – or cared not – to visit. I resented him, resented my own creation. Would he still have wanted me if things had gone right? Would he have treated me as a son or as a brother? Or would I have been abandoned all the same – merely a means to which he could obtain that which he desired? It was at that time that I named myself. I had been born of rage, and so Rayje I would be called."

Tony sighed and glanced up at the rafters, considering his options. "Rayje? Can I tell you something kind of… strange?"

Rayje raised an eybrow. "Strange as in you've seen a vision, or is it some other sort of strange?"

Tony closed his eyes. He had told Gia and Eidon, had told them once before. How would Rayje react? "Other sort. You see… time's been repeating for me. I don't know how, I don't know why. But I do know that I've encountered Agram a lot, and each time I never really understand what he's trying to tell me."

Rayje leaned forward and clasped his hands – thinking, weighing his words carefully. "Time has been repeating… Tell me, what does Agram tell you?"

The memories came swiftly, burnt into his mind by the repetitions. "He says that I am no Child of Agadon, and that the blood of the Ancients flows through me. He tries to get me on his side, claiming that he's just trying to get back knowledge that Agadon stole. A lot of the time, he offers to send me home without a fight."

Rayje's eyebrows narrowed, and his lips twisted into a frown. "That certainly is unusual… Have you ever accepted his offer?"

Tony's heart sank. "Once, early on. Time reset shortly after, so I'm betting that Agram did something really bad."

The Magined Magi closed his eyes in contemplation. "I do not know what he meant about "the blood of the Ancients", but I am certain of one thing – that you are Agadon's reincarnation." Before Tony could protest, Rayje held up one hand to stop him. "I have met Agadon, and the similarities between your energies and his are strikingly similar. But I must ask – why tell me this?"

Tony scooted back on the wood pile and leaned against the wall of the shed. "Because I wanted to say that I know what you meant, when you said you wondered if things had been different. Every time I've met him, Agram has been a twisted person with only one thing on his mind; I guess being rejected all those years ago was really hard on him."

Rayje glanced out the window, trying to gauge the time by the sun's position. "Changing topics, do you remember earlier, when I asked

you about Magining?"

Tony nodded; as he realized where Rayje was going, a smile broke out on his face. "Are you going to teach me? I mean, would you please teach me?"

Rayje smiled and gave a nod, before standing up and stretching. "Indeed I will. Do you have any blank Animite on you?"

Tony patted the pouch Yaki had given him with the change of clothes so long ago. "Yup. Most people here use it for currency, so it's pretty easy to come by."

Rayje opened the shed door and walked out, holding it as Tony passed by him. "First things first – what have you been trying to Magine?"

' *Orwin-screaminginpain-hoodofhiding-KorgandZet-Orwindying* ***dyingDYING!*** *'*

Tony shook his head to clear away the memory. "A Cloud Frond. Vash Naroom's elder gets badly injured at the start of the resets; I want to be able to help him get better as quickly as possible."

Rayje nodded slowly. "Well, I can see one problem you might encounter with that; Magining an existing object – like a Baloo Root or a Cloud Frond – is much harder than creating something new. Objects like these have templates that exist within the Dream Plane; you must draw it out as if you were summoning a creature. Try that first – do not think about it, you have to *know* it, try to not force the Energy in – and we shall see how that goes."

Tony nodded and took out one of the many clear crystals that were currently in his bag. Steadying his breath, he pictured the Cloud Frond and let his energy flow into the crystal. As he did so, the flickering form of a Cloud Frond took shape before him. After a few tense moments, a complete – and solid – version of the plant sat in front of him. "So, how was that?"

Rayje shook his head. "I told you, do not try. I would think that you pictured it in your head?" When Tony nodded in confirmation, the blue-haired Magi sighed. "And that is your problem. You keep trying to create your own pattern for the Cloud Frond; as it stands, this Frond couldn't cure a sick Eebit." Tony glanced at the ground dejected, and Rayje groaned. "If it helps, I will Magine one and I want you to trace what I am doing with your Energy sensing. Do you understand?"

Tony shrugged. "I can only improve from here, so sure. I'll give it a shot." Reaching back into his pouch, Tony tossed his improvised teacher a piece of Animite. Settling down on the ground, the Earthling closed his eyes and tried to open his senses. He had never tried this before, so he was a bit unsure of himself.

Finding the template was easy for Rayje; casting his Energy into the Dream Plane with the barest echo of what he was searching for, it rushed back almost as soon as he had sent it. Rayje caught the Energy as it came, and put a bit more energy into the crystal. The Energy carrying the Cloud Frond template reacted, and as it was attracted to the piece of Animite, he backed it with just enough extra energy for the Frond to materialize.

Tony felt as though his legs had turned to stone; what Rayje had done was completely different to how he had been doing things. "You sent – and then like a magnet – that was totally awesome!" Tony's mouth turned up in a giddy smile, and he began to laugh. "Boy, have I ever been going about things wrong!"

Rayje smiled, pleased that the boy had been able to detect it. "Do you feel ready to try again?"

Tony got to his feet – a bit stiffly – and fumbled for his Animite. "Right!" Tony set his feet into a solid stance, and traced what Rayje had done. Cast out, catch, direct and that final *push* – in less than a second, a new Cloud Frond appeared in a burst of Dream Energy.

"I did it." Tony stared at the leaf, almost not daring to believe that he had succeeded. As the weight of what he had done sank in, another weight – that of Orwin's health – lifted. "Rayje- thank you. Thank you so much!" It was all he could do to keep from hugging the older Magi.

Rayje merely smiled. "All you needed was the correct path."

Tony bit his lip, and glanced at Rayje. "There was something else I've been trying to Magine – or to summon, at least. When I arrived – the very first time I arrived – I ended up Summoning this big Blue Furok. But every time since then, all I've ever been able to Summon is regular Furoks. Do you know why that might be the case?

Rayje closed his eyes in thought. "Perhaps it needs to remember." Noting Tony's perplexed expression, he gestured to himself. "Take me for example. I was Magined, yet I am here. I exist. And there is the chance that I could remember, just like you do. However, that Blue Furok is something in-between – half Magined, half summoned. So answer me this – would you rather call on the one you know, or would you rather have a cheap imitation by your side?"

Tony sat down on a rock and thought about what the blue-haired Magi had said. "Of course I'd want the one I knew. I wouldn't want to just create something and then abandon it when everything reset. It wouldn't be fair. With the other Furoks" – here he pulled a ring out of his pocket – "it's almost like a matter of convenience. We might work together now and get along, but it's not like we'll ever really be friends. "

Rayje smiled. "Of course, have you tried Summoning your Blue Furok this time around? Who knows, maybe sometimes it's just waiting for you to call."

Tony started; he hadn't thought of that possibility. And now that he knew more about how all of this worked…

Standing up, Tony pulled out a fragment of blank animite. It might not work, but it was worth a shot. Taking a deep breath, he sent out the summoning much like he had when he was Magining. The response he got was powerful, nearly enough to knock him off his feet. The energy leapt through the Animite, coalescing into the mighty Blue Furok.

"Tony! I've been so worried about you! All these times we kept running into Korg and Zet at the pond, and then you called, and then you didn't call, and then this nice Tryn lady came to the Dream Plane, and then this eyeball creature thing came through the Dream Plane, and it's been going on and on and on and on and – Mrph!"

Tony put his hands over the Furok's mouth. "Okay, two things. One, I just figured out how to Summon you properly. Two, you've been repeating as well? I'm really, really sorry for leaving you alone all that time. Three – YOU CAN TALK?!"

The Furok scuffed the dirt with a hind paw. "Well, sure I can, Tony. I guess I just never did before. Sorry, Tony."

Tony sighed and scratched the back of his head. "No, I'm sorry. I've been here all this time, and I never asked much about Dream Creatures. You're as sentient as I am, and I've never taken that into consideration. Can you forgive me?"

The Furok nodded, then noticed something nearby. "Hey Tony, this looks sort of like those statue thingies from that place. Do you think it could be one of them? I only saw them the once, so I don't really know…"

A foreboding chill ran up Tony's spine, and his stomach sank. No. No, it couldn't be. Not now, it had never – Taking a deep breath, Tony walked over to where the Furok was gesturing. He pulled back the stalks with a shaking hand… and fell to his knees in shock. "No…"

Rayje clenched his fists, trying to resist punching something. Why? Why? They were such nice people. *'Why, father? They did nothing to*

you! Why!' His heart screamed in anger and rage, and it was a struggle to keep it in. "We should take them back to the cottage. Everyone deserves to know."

Tony nodded, and helped the Furok pull the two frozen figures out of the long grass where they had sat mostly hidden from view. With heavy hearts, the three began the slow process of moving Gia and Eidon to a safer place.

- END PART 10 –

- Part 11: Resolve for the Future -

Grunting as he pulled fresh vegetables from the garden, Yaki thought about Rayje. For what reason could he have come to the Moonlands? Had he come during any other repetitions, or was this a unique occurrence? Shaking a few strands of blonde hair out of his eyes, he placed the purplish root into a basket beside him.

"Not the easiest of runs, I'll admit that. 'Least it'll make the next one seem easy by comparison." He gave a quick count of the food he had gotten, and decided that it would be enough. Standing up, he glanced over to the shed briefly – Tony and Rayje were standing off to the side, and it looked like the legendary Magi was helping the Earthling with his Magining. Satisfied for the moment, Yaki took his haul into the cottage.

Pruitt was vigorously stirring a pot of broth, and smiled at him as he came in the door. "Just put it on the table; I'm almost ready for it. Woot went out back to get some water from the pump –"

As if on cue, Woot shouted from somewhere outside. A loud thump and a splash told the two Magi that he'd dropped his bucket, and the muffled voices of Tony and Rayje (as well as someone else) met with Woot's angry tones. Yaki didn't need to look at Pruitt to know that she was thinking the same thing he was – what was going on?

The Core Stalker nearly tripped over the table trying to get to the door, and behind him Pruitt was slipping a ring onto her finger. Throwing open the woven door, Yaki hesitated for a moment and bit back the bile rising in his throat. "Who did this?"

Tony shook his head. "The only person I can think of is either Morag or Warrada, and with their Core-stench, we would have noticed either of them." Rayje set Gia onto the ground, and the Earthling glanced at her briefly.

Unbidden images sprang into Yaki's mind. *Pruitt being sucked into the ground. The Void Energy sparking and burning as it coursed through his system. The year of hiding from the Dark Twins and watching Naroom suffer. The look of unbridled terror on Woot's face as he stared at the corpse of the Shadow Magi he had helped to kill. Above all, the pain of watching his beautiful green home – his friends and loved ones – turning into a wasted shell of what once had been.*

"Let's get them inside, first of all. After that, we'll plan our course of action." Years of war had made Yaki an effective leader. It hadn't made him a willing one.

"I already know our course of action." Although he tried to keep it from showing, the Naroomi Magi could hear the fear and anger trembling in Tony's voice. "I get the Core Glyph. I go into the Geyser and I close it. Then I go find every other Geyser that's been opened and I close those ones too. If I happen to make a few Shadow Magi regret their choices on the way, then I'm fine with that."

He'd been expecting that sort of response, and Yaki agreed whole-heartedly. "Yeah, that sounds like a mighty good plan to me, 'cept I'm going with ya. Woot and Pruitt will stay here and watch over Eidon and Gia, and Rayje…" He paused briefly. "I'd feel pretty weird, telling you what to do, ya know? You've got way more wisdom and experience than me, so I'll leave you to yourself – if that's alright, ya dig?"

Rayje nodded. "It is agreeable. I had planned to resume my journey tomorrow anyways; I do not think it wise for me to linger here long." The red-cloaked Magi glanced briefly at the rising form of El in the sky, and then carefully picked up the stone-bound Weave Elder. Pruitt and Woot lifted Eidon between them, leaving Yaki and Tony alone.

Yaki sighed and ran one hand through his hair. "Such a mess… Ya know, things don't usually get this bad this fast. Sorry ya had t' see all this, Tony."

Tony sat down on a nearby rock and drew a shuddering gasp, trying to fight back tears. "It's all my fault. If I wasn't here, then Gia and Eidon would be okay right now. If I wasn't here, then Agram would have no way of opening the Geysers. What if it's all in vain? I do the best that I can, but… why does everything have to go bad?"

Yaki sat down beside him, absentmindedly doodling in the dirt. "Y'know… Gia told me something, during one of the past runs. She said that you were having a real tough time of it, and that your burdens were greater than I could ever realize, but that if you need her – at any time – she and Eidon would be there to help you. "

He pulled a stone out of the dirt and began rubbing it in his hands, trying to clean off the dirt. "The way I figure it, we're all like that – if you need us, we'll help you. And even if I don't remember right away, you can still come and talk to me at any time. Unless I've gone all weird, in which case you should probably record weirdo me so you can tell me about it later."

Tony smiled, trying to think about what "weirdo Yaki" would look like. Whatever he was picturing, he broke down laughing and fell off of the rock. "Thank, Yaki. After everything that's been going on, I needed that." Getting to his feet, he began brushing the dirt off of his pants. He went into the cottage for a brief moment and came back out with the Core Glyph in hand. "Let's go reclaim Naroom."

- END PART 11 -

- Part 12: Into the Dark -

The journey back to Vash Naroom was swift and made in silence; both Magi were firm with resolve and the air around them crackled with tension. Before arriving back at the once-great treetop city, Tony directed his Blue Furok (Urfid, apparently) towards the Glade.

Even from a distance, Tony could feel the stench of corrupted void magic permeating the air. "It's gotten worse." The earthling's gut twisted into knots as he considered the events of the past few days. If he hadn't gone along with Orwin's instructions, if he hadn't spent so much time learning Magining… Despite the good that came of it, a sense of failure hung in Tony's heart. *"I won't let it get this bad again. Everyone who's been hurt so far… I can't just sit back on my laurels. Let this be a lesson to me – a lesson for whatever future follows."*

Seated just behind Tony, Yaki nearly retched from the waves of void magic pouring out of the geyser. *"Did I really crave this stuff just a few days ago? It's so stagnant and bitter – not even the dark can thrive in this!"* Glancing up ahead, his stomach twisted as the tangled thorns and sharp violet spires of the Geyser entrance came into view. The sky was dark and gloomy; the only source of light came from the corrupted twisting of void magic and Life energy rushing skyward like a strange, silent river. Climbing off of Urfid's back, Tony dismissed him with a promise to call if things started going wrong.

"So, then, it's time to begin. What can we expect out of this thing?" Yaki gestured to the entrance with his thumb, green eyes glinting with shards of red light.

Tony walked forwards, one hand in his pocket and holding the Core Glyph. "It's a maze of doors – open the wrong one, and you might never find the one you need. At the end is Togoth – he's the creepy three-eyed Shadow Magi who controls this place. He didn't pose much of a challenge when I first fought him, but since the Geyser's been open so long this time…"

Yaki nodded, his face grim and shadowed. "We'll deal with that when we get to it. For now, we'll just need to bust through here – and try to save Tryn, Barak and Evu while we're at it. Though considering how they manage when everything's normal, Evu might be the only one we need to take into account."

Turning back to the Geyser entrance, Yaki took a deep, calming breath – and reached for the Void magic within him. He drew it up – the cold, ever present dark magic leapt to his command almost unbidden – and mixed it with the warm and musical green of his native Naroomi magic. Placing his hand on the barrier, he felt it melt beneath his touch. The Geyser had recognized one of its own.

Tony whistled in appreciation, and gave the Core Stalker a thumbs-up as he walked past. "Nice work! Now, let's go get that Core Stone!"

In silent determination, the two Magi entered the Geyser. Yaki's Void-sharp eyes adjusted immediately to the darkness of his surroundings, and Tony took a shard of crystal animate from one of his many pockets. A flash of light later, and Tony picked a pair of dark-lensed glasses off the ground and put them on.

"Night-vision glasses. They're much less clunky than the sort you'd find on earth – Magining's got all sorts of benefits."

Yaki nodded, and both headed into the maze ahead of them. Tony led the way, and while some levers and gates worked differently than usual, by this point the Earthling was getting used to predicting what lever would do what and where it would be. At one point, Tony Magined a pair of crystalline walkie-talkies, and the two split up to cover more ground.

Despite the dire situation, Yaki found himself enjoying battling the random Core creatures that he ran into. At one point he happened to stumble over a Darkbreed Hyren; although he bemoaned losing it once time reset, he was nonetheless glad to have a Hyren that reflected his other half. *"Definitely going to have to remember this place – if I remember in time."*

The two rejoined in front of the final door. "Well, that didn't take as long as expected. I've been meaning to be faster about dealing with these, and having another person along really helped." Tony grinned. "Now for Togoth. I'll admit that I'm half expecting him to be stronger than usual, and I won't lie – the other half is hoping he'll pose more of a challenge.

Yaki shrugged, a small smirk managing to worm it's way onto his face despite his best efforts. "I know the feeling. Only one way to find out, though." Stepping forward, he opened the final door and both stepped through.

They were blinded almost immediately; some source of light inside the room overloading their dark-adapted senses. Tony tore off his night-vision glasses, and Yaki rubbed his eyes furiously. As his vision cleared, Yaki heard a voice that caused his heart to sink into the pit of his stomach.

"What's the matter, were you expecting that loser, Togoth? A pity – all that preparation for nothing!"

Tony blinked the last stars out of his eyes and looked at the Magi standing before him. The stench of Void Magic rolled off of both the speaker and from the tall, blond-haired Calder to her left.

Twirling a red-brown lock from her ponytail around one finger, she grinned at him with too-sharp teeth, burning red eyes set into an ash-grey face.

"Weren't expecting poor little Tryn and big, strong Barack, were you?"

- END PART 12 -

- Part 13: On Two Fronts -

Yaki grimaced at the Core-stench that the two Magi were radiating. "Well, this is sure different. I can say I wasn't expecting the pair of

you to be here; and I can say I don't like it one bit, you dig?"

Tryn's giggle – normally bright and welcoming – sounded like rasping stone and squeaking rats. "Like you're one to talk. How long have you been in touch with the master anyways? Has it been ten years? A hundred?"

She ran one hand through her hair, drawing it out to its full length. "Not that it matters, of course. Whether you're with us against Kyros or out for your own profit, I couldn't care less. Either way, just stay out of my branches and let me rip the brat to shreds."

Tony stepped past Yaki and raised his hand, Urfid's ring glinting in the torchlight. "Not happening. I have to wonder where Evu is though; I would have thought he'd be here with the two of you." His mind was racing and trying to construct strategies; his energy was gathered and waiting to be released.

"That sorry old core-fodder? He's hardly worth anything, much less the energy it took to corrupt the geezer." Tryn shrugged, the twisted smile on her face taking on a condescending tone. "The old slug is back in Vash Naroom; Warrada had a job for him in the library."

Tony glanced at Yaki; the Core Stalker's face had paled and he was no doubt thinking of the long war. "Go. I can handle these losers." Yaki nodded and turned on his heel, heading back towards the Geyser's entrance.

"You'd better give 'em stink, ya dig?" The Naroomi's words lingered after his presence had faded, emboldening the Earthling and aggravating the two Shadow Magi.

Tony reached into his pouch, withdrawing both his Crystal Animite shard and a Plith ring. "All right, who here is ready to rumble?"

Yaki rushed through the forest on his Leaf Hyren's wings; There was no way Evu could be allowed to find – or translate – the scroll Warrada was after. "Dude, this is way messed up. Man, I hope Pru

doesn't remember any of this – don't think she'd be much happy about things."

The Hyren snorted. While it didn't know that its master was up to, it could sense his anxiety and flew as fast as its energy would allow back to the treetop city.

Atop the Hyren's back, Yaki watched the forest intently. He noted every little movement, every shadow that darted between the corrupted trees. A frown of displeasure crossed his face upon seeing the Fiend of Furoks below, though he was gone before she could look for him.

Vash Naroom was black and withered; thorns and bracken crawled everywhere, and it seemed much sicker than when the Dark Twins were in charge. The stench of Agram's magic was everywhere, and even the sky writhed an oily black. The only light in the city came from Evu's hut, and the Core Stalker prayed that he would make it in time.

He recalled his Hyren upon landing and prepared some of his Wasperine rings; small size would suit an indoor battle better. Opening the door softly, he looked through the crack to survey the room. Evu was hunched at his desk, muttering under his breath and scratching notes onto a piece of parchment.

So the old one had found the scroll. It seemed he hadn't finished translating it yet or sent it to Warrada though - this was good. He raised a fist to the door and hesitated for a brief second. *It would be so easy to strike now…* the moment passed and he rapped three times on the wooden frame.

Evu whirled around and, upon spotting Yaki, broke into a rasping guffaw. "Well now, here's a face I didn't expect to see. If you came expecting jelly beans, then you're out of luck." Rising from his chair, the historian withdrew a ring from some pocket hidden in his robe and placed it on his finger. "It's such a shame, what became of you.

Even I can see that you've shunned Agram's gift; you could have had so much potential."

Yaki shrugged off Evu's words and struck quickly, Dreaming up five Wasperines in a row. Taking a moment to gather more energy, he cast a Verdant Shield to protect his tiny friends.

Evu summoned an Arboll Stalker to his side, and then took a deep breath as power swirled around him; age may not have been kind to his memory, but strength was not something he lacked. Exhaling slowly, a wicked violet fog enshrouded the two combatants.

Yaki began to cough as the fog entered his lungs; his energy began to drop slowly, and his Dream Creatures squealed in pain as they were forced back to the Dream Plane. One lone wasperine remained long enough to dispatch the Arboll Stalker, and it took only a pulse of Yaki's own Void Magic for the fog to cease its effects.

This had gone a lot better in the first iteration. Of course, at that time he had just use his fists, staff and magic… "Man, why does the answer have ta' always be starin' me in the face?" He reached out his hand and with a burst of green light, he summoned the staff that Pruitt had made for him so long ago. With light curiosity he noted that some of the nicks and scars had been gained in some of the repetitions… Ah well. Best to think on that when he *wasn't* in battle.

Whilst Evu was in the middle of summoning out a new Core Creature, Yaki focused his energy through the staff while holding a shard of Crystal Animite in his opposite hand. *"Man, I really hope this works. It'll suck if it doesn't."* Right before the old Magi could finish his Dreaming, Yaki reached out with his magic and pulled on the tainted energy inside Evu.

Evu groaned as his energy was siphoned into the staff, and he slumped to the floor as if very tired. An oily black smoke began to evaporate off of him, and this Yaki directed to the Animite shard with fierce concentration, panting as the energy drain took its toll. When

the first tendril of smoke touched the piece of Animite, the rest imploded in on the shard, changing and warping its very nature.

Yaki released his grip on Evu's magic and watched as the cool black flames of pure Void Magic returned to the unconcious Historian. Placing the shard in his pocket, he pulled out a small flask of Baloo Root extract and measured out three drops into the elder's mouth. "Not as hard as I expected, but I'm definitely gonna feel it tomorrow."

Evu sighed and turned over in his sleep, finally relaxed and at peace. The Core Stalker moved him to his bed and then went over to the scroll currently laid out on the desk. Reading over the foreign letters, he noticed a few diagrams that made him sick to his stomach. Without hesitation he lit the scroll on fire with a nearby candle and watched as Warrada's ambitions went up in smoke.

And now that he knew what she was looking for, he would be able to be rid of it next time. Heck, maybe he would even tell Tony, and the Earthling could be rid of it even faster.

Unless she started looking for something else, but that tree would be dealt with when it sprouted. Easing himself onto the doorsill to rest, he looked at Evu sleeping soundly and then out towards the geyser where Tony was currently fighting. "Sorry, Tony. Guess that one's up to you."

Tony dodged behind a pillar as Tryn threw wave after wave of Void Magic at him, and closed his eyes at the scorching heat from a ball of molten stone hit the wall just to his left. Barak's Lava Aq clicked its pincers and readied another orb, trying to find a good angle of attack.

Urfid wasn't having much luck either. The mighty Blue Furok was much stronger than he should have been, but due to his large size he had been constantly pelted with spells and attacks. "Tony, I don't think we can keep this up much longer!" He groaned as a lava ball hit him and struggled to keep himself from being undreamt.

"I know, just give me a minute!" Sensing a brief lull in the attack, the young Magi sent some of his energy into the Crystal Animite in his hand. In a second two floating cannons appeared in the air and began to lock onto Tryn and Barak's Dream Creatures.

Gathering more energy, Tony darted out from behind the pillar and cast a Sap of Life onto Urfid. The Furok sighed in relief as his energy surged back to full, and he charged the Lava Aq. With one shake of his head he tossed the Aq at the rear wall of the chamber and sent its energy scattering back to the Dream Plane.

Tryn shrieked in anger and dreamt up a horde of Chaos Pliths that swarmed towards Urfid; Tony cast two Underneath spells in quick succession and hoped he wasn't going to bring the roof down on their heads. A Ground-Breaker would reflect the energy of the pliths back at Tryn, and a Thunderquake to disperse the pliths themselves.

Tryn groaned and slumped to the ground as her energy left her, and Barack was thrown against the wall by Urfid; the mighty Calder hit his head against the stone and was out like a light. Glad that the battle was over at last, Tony sat down against the pillar and took several deep breaths to calm his nerves and try to replenish his energy.

He glanced at the two unconscious Shadow Magi and sighed. "What am I going to do with these two, Urfid? The blue Furok padded over and lay down beside Tony.

"Heal them, maybe? I dunno if you could, but it's worth a shot at least." Urfid snorted as the shadows of the geyser tried to close in and sent the dark mists scattering. "A couple of the go-rounds I met this cute little Korrit named Kyug after you left, and he was babbling on and on about 'Grej this and Ulk that', and 'tickle Ogar to wake her from dark dreams'.

Tony rubbed his chin as he considered Urfid's words. "I don't know about tickling them, but I might be able to Magine something that would help. Keep in mind it might not work though, okay?" The

Earthling stood up and grimaced as his muscles protested the action; raising his Crystal Animite, he sent his energy into it with a specific thought. With some effort, he Magined a plant with golden leaves and picked it. "Here goes nothing."

Crushing one of the leaves, he held it in front of Tryn with baited breath. She shuddered in her sleep and her face contorted for a moment; to Tony's relief, the darkness lifted from her and the grim pallor on her face faded. Though not entirely banished, Tony was confident that she'd recover in time and be able to reject Agram of her own accord.

It took only a moment for Tony to dispatch the corruption in Barack as well and Dreamt up a Leaf Chogo to help him lift the duo onto Urfid's back. Once they were secured, he took the Core Stone and placed it into the Glyph. "One down, four to go. Maybe more, but hopefully not." As he watched the Geyser dissolve into nothing, the Earthling Magi was filled with a sense of accomplishment. "Come on, Urfid. Let's go fill in Yaki on what happened."

The two left the glade and made their way through the silent forest, the presence of the Core no longer looming over Naroom.

- END OF PART 13 -

And there we have it - the Naroom Geyser is dealt with and Tony has gotten a focus on Magining. As I stated before, the next few snips will be shifting back to the more random nature of things to ease up on all the doom and gloom I've been giving this thing. See you all next time!

In Anachronistic Order

Magi-Nation 4.1 (Cartoon)

Tony blinked as reality seemed to settle in on itself; a moment prior he had been in Vash Naroom celebrating Agram's final defeat, and now he was sitting on his grandfather's bed watching Spencer flip through his sketchbook. *Okay... what just happened? Why am I back home?* Shaking the thoughts out of his head for the moment, he smiled as Spencer handed him the ring that held Furok's animite.

Bidding the old man good night, he stopped by the chest in the hall and used a safety pin (taken from under the bathroom sink) to pick the lock. After rummaging through the relics – quietly and delicately – he found the relic that held the Core Dream Stone and stuck it into the pockets of his track pants.

"Okay, Grandpa. I'm not letting you stay sick any longer than you have to." He bit back a yawn and sighed. "Well, looks like it's bedtime for me. Tomorrow's a big day, and I don't plan on missing it."

Edyn stretched her arms over her head to loosen the tense muscles in her shoulders. "Okay, let's see – first, I'm back in Vash Naroom and there's no sign of the damage or rebuilding from Agram's attack. Second, the Book of Elders is back in its case. Neither Orwin nor Evu would do that, so there must be something else going on…" She glanced down at herself and sighed.

"And lastly, I'm wearing that stupid hood and cloak again. Why did I think it was a good idea again?" She pulled the cloak off and grimaced. "Wow, this thing *really* stinks. I bet the smell of it alone would drive even Korg and Zed crazy." Leaving her cloak in a pile on the floor next to the case, she lifted off the glass and pulled out the Book of Elders. It took all her nerve to not drop the precious Book

upon getting a better look at it. "What the… This is how it looked before! What's going on here?"

"What's going on is that you're going to give me the Book, little girl." The dry, rasping voice behind her sent a chill down her spine and she spun around. "Agram. Why am I not surprised to see YOU again?" It was unnerving to see his dull eyes and sunless skin again; she'd almost gotten used to seeing GorGram instead.

The old Magi frowned. "Again… Now there's an interesting question. Almost as interesting as what you said about 'before'." He waved a hand as if to dismiss the thoughts. "No matter. I'll find out what your babbling meant soon enough. Now, the Book."

Edyn's answer was to raise one hand, energy swirling about her fingers and ready to be released as a spell. "As if I'd ever do that. Storm Flare!" A bolt of bright lightning filled the room, dispersing the illusory Magi and casting the library in a pale blue light. "You're never going to get the Book, Agram. It wouldn't do you any good anyway." Placing the Book of Elders into her satchel, she turned to leave the chamber, with only a parting glance at where Agram had been. "Now, where was Strag again? I can't be the only one who remembers."

In the silence that followed, she missed seeing Orwin sigh and rub the bridge of his nose as he watched her leave.

Strag took a deep breath and let the soft light of the Homeworld filter through his closed eyelids. The bark of a sturdy tree branch rubbed against his shoulder blades and the cool scent of the forest filled the air. *How long has it been since I last sat in a tree like this? Is it one year? Two? Or is it less than that? It seems as if only a moment ago we had summoned the Final Hyren and defeated Agram once and for all.*

All at once, a chill passed over him – one unmistakable and horribly familiar that caused him to jerk to his feet in a cold sweat. "What

was- but this cannot be!" Hearing footsteps below, he glanced at the ground and saw Edyn searching the trees and slightly out of breath. "Edyn, what is going on? Just now I felt Agram's presence; did we not defeat him for good merely days ago?"

The red-haired Naroomi sighed in relief and slumped to the ground. "You'd better get down here, Strag. Something strange is going on, and I don't know how to explain it."

The shadow stalker nodded and leapt down from his tree-top perch with ease. "I will admit that I have not noticed much; when I came to, I was resting in the tree."

"Agram being back is only part of what's happening – he sent an apparition to obtain the Book of Elders, and he didn't seem to recognize me when I spoke to him – or, threatened him, really. I kind of took out the apparition with a Storm Flare." Edyn started and shook her head vigerously. "Wait, no, we're getting off track. Anyways, Agram we can deal with. There's something else that's more pressing right now." Reaching into her satchel, she pulled out the Book. "Take a look at this, and you'll see what I mean."

Strag took the offered Book and gasped. "But this – this is the way it was before the Final Hyren quest! How by the Homeworld could it have transformed again?"

Edyn shook her head. "Right now, nothing comes to mind. I'm going to look through the Great Library to try to find some answers."

Strag crossed his arms and hummed. "It may be that Evu and Orwin will still summon Tony from Earth. I will make my way to the Weave and meet with him. Do not forget that Korg and Zed desire the Book for Agram; be prepared for any attack they might bring."

Edyn smiled. "You don't have to worry about that. Ugger and I can handle anything those two throw at us." She paused. "Wait. What if our Dream Creatures have forgotten too? When we first started out,

Freep could barely handle one Rolldozer and it took Furok to bail us out."

The Shadow Stalker turned towards the Weave road. "If it comes to that, then I will make the most of the situation and plan around it." He glanced back at Edyn and smiled. "Besides, if Tony also remembers then the issue will be moot – after all, he too has grown stronger from the trials we have faced together."

Their paths determined, the two Magi started down their respective paths and towards the challenges ahead.

Before leaving the house that morning, Tony had double-checked that the Core Dream Stone was still in his pocket and Furok's ring was dangling from a shoelace around his neck. After arriving at the track, he began his warm-ups and tried to repress a groan as the coach started talking about "oxygen to muscle groups". *Seriously? We learned this at the beginning of the year before we even got on the track! Why are you talking about this now?*

Once his warmups were finished, he moved to the starting block and got into position. *Right leg forwards to push off, left leg back to take the first stride. Fingertips on the ground just in front of my shoulders to get me vertical. It's been a while since I did this; I hope I'm not too rusty.*

After watching Edyn's confrontation with Agram in the library, Orwin had rushed to Evu's house as fast as he could. After filling the elder in on what had happened, both Naroomi had decided that it would be essential to at last call on the Final Dreamer.

"Evu, have you heated the stone to temperature?" Orwin resisted the urge to pace around the elder Magi's small living room, instead fiddling with the ring in his hand.

"Yes, it's ready. If it got any hotter at this point, the whole thing would be a puddle of lava on the floor." She reached for a pair of smithing tongs beside the fire and gingerly picked up the fragment of pitchstone. "This is the last piece we have from the day Agram was sealed into the Core; this our last hope. If we cannot summon the Final Dreamer…" Neither wished to think of the consequences of failure.

Orwin took a second pair of smithing tongs off of the table and gripped the ring with them. "Final Dreamer, please heed our call – our darkest hour draws near, and your strength is needed. Please, hear us!" With those words, he touched the ring to the volcanic stone and both emitted a brilliant green glow.

It had begun.

Tony glanced behind him and watched as the other racers maneuvered through the winding trees that lined the path. "Good. Looks like it's almost time for –" Before he had time to register the green light that the ring was emitting, he was already tumbling through the gateway between Earth and the Moonlands. He reappeared in the Weave several feet off of the ground and was immensely grateful for the giant blades of grass that broke his fall. "-me to get going. Well, that could have gone better. Still, I should probably start looking for Edyn…"

Picking a direction (hopefully the same as last time, he meandered through the grass until he came upon a familiar grove – and a familiar face. "Strag! It's good to see you; wasn't Edyn coming?"

The underneathian shook his head. "No. She discovered that something strange is taking place; she is currently in the Great Library searching for answers." He stood up and dusted off his pants. "We had feared that you would remember nothing, and I am relieved to learn that that was not the case."

Tony closed his eyes. "Actually, I think I might know what's going on – partially, at least. I'll fill you in on the way to Vash Naroom." Taking the ring off the shoelace on his neck, Tony sent some of his energy into it and held it aloft. "With this Animite, I Magine Furok!"

The antlered bear appeared in a flash of green light and glanced at Tony. "I figured you'd call me in battle – there are no enemies here for me to face. For your first Magining, you're not doing a good job of it."

Strag winced at Furok's words, but Tony took it in stride. "It's actually not my first Magining; right now we –" here he gestured to himself and Strag "- need to get to the city of Vash Naroom in a hurry. Do you think you could please give us a lift?"

Furok snorted and turned away. "Why should I? I'm a warrior, not some mindless beast of burden."

Tony glanced at Strag. "Because a friend of ours might be in danger. We want to help her, but we can't get there in time without you." He smirked as an idea came to him. "And besides, danger means a fight. You wouldn't want to miss it, would you?" Behind him, Strag was rolling his eyes at the antics. Tony ignored him and stood near Furok's face. "So, what do you say? Will you please take us?"

The mighty Dream Creature's eyes darted back and forth as he considered it, and finally groaned. "Fine, I'll do it. But next time you'd better summon me in a battle, got it?"

Tony nodded eagerly. "That won't be a problem, I can promise you that." The two Magi climbed onto Furok's back and the three of them started loping back to Vash Naroom.

Their worries turned out to be well founded. Edyn was in the main plaza hurling spell after spell at Korg and Zed, though the two Shadow Magi seemed adept at dodging them. "It's about time the three of you got here! Ugger got sent back pretty quickly, and these two are putting up a bigger fight than I expected."

Furok shook his back and sent Tony and Strag sprawling on the ground. "Well, at least you told the truth about the fight. This is gonna be *fun* ." With a roar of fury, one ton of shaggy blue muscle crashed into Korg and Zed.

Edyn took a moment to breath before joining her friends. "So, Tony remembers too? It doesn't look like Furok does though…"

Tony shook his head. "No, he doesn't. And for that matter, he seems to be a little weird this time – on the way here, he couldn't stop talking about battles and fights and stuff. It's going to be kind of strange working with him – this time, at least."

Edyn crossed her arms and glared at her friend. "'This time'? What do you mean by 'this time'?"

Tony sighed. "Okay, I already told Strag this, but on Earth there's this story called Groundhog Day, and it's all about this one guy living one day over and over again. There are other stories about time travel and stuff, but the way I experienced it made me think of that one."

"Wait, so this won't be the only time this happens? Every time we defeat Agram then it starts over and we have to do everything all over again?" She winced as Korg and Zed were sent flying, and the two Shadow Magi ran off to who knows where. With a word of thanks, Tony returned Furok to the Dream Plane and then continued his explanation.

Tony shook his head. "That depends on a lot of things – like everything actually restarting, for instance." He snapped his fingers and his face lit up. "I just had an idea – instead of me just telling you guys, I can show you. We can use the Vortex Relic right here in Naroom – once we have a moment – and I can play the movie. I think Grandpa has a copy, so it won't be that hard."

The two Moonlanders glanced at each other. "If it would save time explaining and trying to figure things out on our own, then I am all for it." Strag said.

Edyn nodded. "I'm definitely in. Anything we can learn will prove beneficial later on."

Tony smiled, and then gasped as he remembered something. "Oh, right! I think we can cut out one part of our search!" He reached into his pocket and took out the relic he had put there earlier – now broken and revealing its true contents. "Ta-da! One Core Dream Stone, at your service."

Edyn gasped in delight! "That's brilliant, Tony! That'll definitely save us some time. Can I have it?"

Tony nodded and handed it to her. Reaching into her satchel, she pulled out the Book of Elders and placed the Core Dream Stone into the centre of the cover. "One down, eleven to go."

Laughing happily, the three started for the great Library. No matter what came, they would face it together.

- End 4.1 -

Magi-Nation 4.2 (Cartoon)

"Okay, can someone tell me why Morag suddenly took a level in 'really stupid strong!?'" Tony ducked a stray spell bolt from the Shadow Magi and quickly slipped on his Blast Gloves.

An eagle's cry tore the air as Strag let loose the power of his Piercing Howl Relic. "I do not know; I cannot recall him ever being this strong – perhaps it has something to do why Furok acted so strangely during our first repeat." Morag's Shadow Creature swiped its paw at the Underneathian and grazed his shoulder. "Whatever the reason for this change, we must defeat him quickly."

Edyn raised her hands into the air and drew upon her dwindling energy. "I cast *Wind Slice* !" Bright green blades of wind struck the Shadow Creature, barely scratching its hard shell. "I'm just

wondering why Agram stuck *him* at the Vortex Relic this time instead of Korg, Zed and Chur. It doesn't make any sense!"

Watching their pitiful attempts to defeat his Shadow Creature, Morag laughed. "The reason is because I am Agram's most loyal – and powerful – servant. You have proven yourselves to be a threat; it is my duty to end that threat." Raising one hand, he prepared another bolt of Void Energy. "Surrender, and your ends will be less painful."

Tony shook his head. "No way. We won't give up here! Furok, Energy Shield!" With a roar, his Dream Creature companion cast a shell of blue energy around the six combatants.

"Good plan, Tony! Freep, add your Shell-Guard and increase our defenses!" The mushroom-turtle nodded at Strag and gathered his energy, raising a magenta barrier beneath Furok's Energy Shield.

Morag shook his head. "Such defenses are meaningless." The bolt of Void Energy struck both shields and pierced them easily, striking Furok and returning him to the Dream Plane. "Your end has come."

Tony had barely a moment to blink before a second jet of Void Energy struck Strag; as he turned to help his friend, he felt a searing pain on his back-

- And blinked awake digging through his closet for his track shoes. An icy chill gripped his heart and he shivered. Taking a deep breath to try and drive away the cold, the seriousness of what had happened sank in.

"I… died. I really died. I wonder how Edyn and Strag are doing right now?"

In Vash Naroom, Strag gasped awake and clutched his chest. "I am alive. A moment ago I was dead… I do not ever wish to experience that again." Climbing down from the tree slowly, he headed to the Library to meet with Edyn. "I think that I will need a moment of rest before we begin again."

- End 4.2 -

Magi Nation - 4.3 (MND, Fused Loop with Harry Potter)

(HARRY'S POV)

It's been an interesting few years lately, ever since Tony Jones had appeared on the train to Hogwats. He seems to be an average enough Looper, and asking for a Baseline Loop is understandable - primarily because it sounds like he wants to take full advantage of the various resources. What's more interesting is that the visiting Looper has asked to handle as many threats as he can - probably as a test of strength. And the way he has handled each of the challenges so far hasn't been too stressful. They have been bizarre, though.

First Year he turned Quirrel-mort into a fusion of Darth and Yami from the Okami Loops. The resultant Dark Lord looked more like Madame Leota than any real threat and was about as effective too. He ran with his tail between his legs – or rather, just sort of drifted off into the distance. It was hilarious.

Second year, all the Gilderoy Lockhart books had unexplainable (and very slight) differences. What's more, they always ended up different each day. Lockhart went mental trying to figure it out; he ended up locking himself in his quarters for most of the year. Incidentally, it also ended up with the truant teacher proclaiming that he wasn't the hero the books made him out to be. Apparently Aurors had been dispatched. For some reason though, neither the basilisk nor the diary turned up; I've yet to see if they're just late or if it's a variant.

Third Year was a breeze; to be honest, it was quite relaxing. Tony apparently convinced Hagird to let him summon some of the Magical Creatures that were apparently a "common part of western magical cuture. Or something." I have to admit, I rather liked this part of his Loop. Draco stormed off after being unable to Dream Up a Weebo (for reference, one of the most basic Dream Creatures according to Tony), and the claims of them being viscious, hideous beasts was

easily negated when it started nuzzling the Ministry agent sent to check.

He also managed to get Sirius cleared of all charges, which was nice. The old pensive trick works every time – I'm glad he thought of it himself. There was the whole "Illegal Animagus" thing to deal with, though. Sirius got a number of hours of community service out of the debacle, and he did have to register his Animagus form. All in all though, it was dealt with splendidly. Pettigrew was been charged with being an illegal Animagus, attempted murder, blackmail and various other charges. He did escape before he could interrogated, but the ministry has promised to capture him and bring him to justice.

Professor Lupin went unrevealed (Which was nice for him, not having to worry about that). Still, he did say that he found the position extremely stressful, and resigned anyways. I received a letter from him saying that he was currently staying in Grimmauld Place with Sirius. I should probably fear for the world… eh. I'm not in Hufflepuff, so it should be fine.

Fourth Year was a bit of an experiment. He managed to somehow compete in the Triwizard Tournament (which I haven't bothered to figure out yet) blew away the competitions with ease. In the first challenge he Dreamed up a beast of cloud and lightning to distract the dragon (An Arabian Sand Stalker; an impressive specimen) and walked past the two quarreling giants to pick up the egg, and straight through the whole mess right on back. The look on the dragon's face when it realized what had happened was priceless.

The second challenge was just plain funny. Tony took something called an "Orothean Belt out of his Pocket (apparently it would let him breath and swim while exposed to great pressure underwater) and jumped into the lake. By the time we got there, everyone was laughing and playing exploding snap. This was apparently due to Tony's "most precious thing" being a surly old merman. The mind boggles.

The final challenge seemed to wear on him though. As we prepared to go to the graveyard, it seemed to get stronger – a reluctance and acceptance, a tiredness of spirit. The way he looked at the cup, though… I can only imagine the demons he's faced in his home Loop, be they variant or baseline. It's not the sort of look you want to see on the face of a younger Looper. There's a darkness there – a void that seems to swallow the light in his eyes.

And then there's Magining – the ultimate power from his Loop, and one that's been restricted due to its versatility.

He explained that he can create anything – anything at all – so long as it isn't alive, doesn't stick between loops, (and that includes Pockets) and isn't from a quarantined Branch. He then showed me what he'd prepared for dealing with Voldemort. A Magined phial of my blood, Pettigrew's lost finger (must have been difficult to do that one) and a bunch of golden flowers that I didn't recognize off the top of my head. While I'd have to go through the Portkey on my own (so he wouldn't be struck dead), he promised to trace the magic signature and follow right after me.

I could describe what happened in the graveyard that night, but there's only one thing I'd really like to note: before we left, Voldemort and Pettigrew were playing a rather interesting game of "avoid the Magined Weeping Angels that will send you to the Ministry of Defence." With Justin Beiber's music playing in the backgrounds. At least the event seemed to lift his spirits.

Fifth year will certainly be interesting.

(Tony's POV)

It's been quite a while since I looped into a high school setting, and despite the... issues ... I encountered in my earlier years, I am actually enjoying Hogwarts. At the very least, it's give me an advantage with my Spell-casting. In fact, maybe I should start writing some Spells of my own; it'll be nice to give Edyn a run for her money when our Loops next fuse.

It's currently fifth year, and from what the anchor (THE Harry Potter - the original seven are essentially Looper Celebrities!) had said, this was the year when things had really heated up. And if dive-bombing ducks singing Justin Beiber tunes isn't 'heated up, I don't know what is. The next time Yaki Wakes up early, I'll definitely have a few stories for him. As for the moment - here it is. The classroom of the dreaded Dolores Umbridge. Pretty soon I'll be given my shot at dealing with Ms. Crazy Cat Lady herself.

Yeah, I'm smirking. It's allowed.

After settling in and unpacking his materials, Tony braced himself for what was likely going to be a painful class. Umbridge's lessons seemed to vary – judging on the various tales he'd heard from other Loopers – but baseline seemed to have one key factor that all seemed to dread:

Reading. In particular, reading the driest, most boring theoretically philosophic book imaginable. It was only two minutes in before Tony raised his hand. Umbridge glanced over at Tony. If she had been wearing a pair of pince-nez, he would have expected her to adjust them impertinently. "What is it, Mr. Jones?" That voice was too sickly sweet to mean anything good.

Instead of commenting on the horrendous nature of her voice, Tony pointed at a page in his book. "In this paragraph, the author mentions that:

'The abhorrent practice of physically training one`s self in order to perform such spells as will defend against the forces of Dark Magic should be banned. All that is needed is a sufficient grasp of the theory and the spiritual strength to guide the spell properly. Exercising creates an exaggerated, bloated, ugly and muggle-like body mass that is unbecoming of a young witch or wizard. In addition, those with tainted blood are more prone to this condition and thus should not be allowed to learn such arts as those sacred magiks defend us and keep us hidden from all prying eyes.'

"Judging from the author's tone and the publish date, I'm wondering as to why we were given this particular book to study. Are we supposed to be comparing it to a later work? Or are we supposed to not the fallacies and compare them to modern beliefs about magic?"

Umbridge sniffed. "Neither, Mr. Jones. You are to read the book and to take it as fact. This is the ministry-approved curriculum; it would not be set if it was not crucial to your development."

Tony tapped his chin with his quill. "Yeah, I get that, but… The author's incredibly biased, and his current line of thinking is outdated. To be quite honest, this seems like either a debate piece or as supplementary material for First Years."

Rising from her desk, Umbridge scribbled furiously on a piece of paper and marched over to Tony's desk. "I do not care for your insinuations, Mr. Jones. For the next week, you will be having detention in my office. Any tardiness on your part will result in prolonged visits."

Tony nodded and sat down, biting back a grimace as he continued the Extremely Dry Book. Phase one – complete.

Tony arrived that evening already expecting his punishment – the legendary Blood Quill. He had hidden a piece of raw animite in his pockets under his robes and was running various re-maginings through his mind, trying to adjust the magic to counteract the blood-quill's power.

The old toad was waiting for him, a desk sitting innocently among all of the explosive pink-ness of her room. "Sit down, Mr. Jones. You will not require any of your own effects; everything you need will be provided."

Tony did as asked, and Umbridge passed him several sheaves of paper. "You will write 'I will not ask irrelevant questions in class.' You

will repeat this 250 times OR until you get the message. Do I make myself clear?"

Tony nodded, and picked up the quill. He had heard many stories from visiting Loopers about this simple pen – of how it drew on the user's own blood for ink, and cut the words written into their hand. And now it was his turn. A quick study of the incantation and he had rewritten the enchantment – a simpler Magining than he had expected. The quill now drew on the vast quantities of his own blood held in cold storage in his Pocket for transfusions or blood magic.

After ten minutes, Umbridge was looking at him rather strangely. After twenty, she came over and glanced at his sheet. Each line had a number beside it, and the words glinted red in the right light. She then glanced at the unmarked skin on both of his hands. Although perplexed, she returned to her seat.

After one hour and twenty minutes of this, Tony brought his parchment up to her desk. All two hundred and fifty lines were copied down. "Am I free to go, Professor?" he asked.

Although bewildered, Umbridge nodded her consent.

The next day, there was a new quill and sheaf of paper waiting for him. And once again, he re-Magined the quill and everything went smoothly, despite Umbridge's growing paranoia. He kept the quill on the third day – linked to his stores, it might prove useful in the future. On the fourth day, it was clear that Umbridge was becoming unhinged – something that Tony made sure to mention to the headmaster. Dumbledore promised to speak to the Minister.

On the fifth day, he arrived to find Umbridge in a terrible state. Her hair and clothes were askew, and Tony was certain that if the plates could speak, all of her painted cats would be meowing anxiously. The Earthling Magi felt a pang of guilt at driving her to this state. "Same as last time, professor?"

She nodded wearily, and Tony got to work. His work progressed in silence, and several times she glanced over. And yet he sat there continuing to write, the sleeve of his robe draped casually over his hand. The time seemed to stretch on, and it was with relief that she saw him place down the quill.

When he came up to deliver his papers, he was startled to see that she had been crying. It almost made him ashamed to have pulled this stunt. Bigoted and self-interested as she was, her shallow nature was barely worth speaking of. In ordinary circumstances, he would ignore her and carry on. An individual who was barely a footnote in society.

Still, the fact remained that she was, in fact, bigoted and in a position of power that allowed her to take advantage of and harm those in her care. And that – a fact which he would not tolerate or remain blind to – kept his resolve firm.

"Professor?" Umbridge looked at Tony through tearful eyes. He glanced at his sore and bleeding hand. "I don't mean to bother you, but do you have a kerchief or something? I seem to have had a bit of an accident." She blinked back the tears and glanced at his hand. Through the blood, you could barely see "I must not ask irrelevant questions in class" carved into the skin.

"I'll see about getting something for your hand, but I want to ask you first – did you learn your lesson?"

Tony nodded. "Magic schools in America usually let students ask questions about the material if they don't understand it. I normally apply that in my other classes, and I didn't think about whether or not that would be acceptable for you. Still, my crack about the First Years was uncalled for, and for that I apologize." He paused, letting his words sink in. "I hope you don't mind me asking this, ma'am, but… The reason for the High Inquisitor, and for the higher restrictions - is it because of what happened at the Triwizard Tournament last year?"

Umbridge's expression hardened. "Mr. Jones, I can assure you that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named has not returned, and never will. We are at PEACE now."

Tony smiled sadly. "Yeah, I get where you're coming from. My family's been real keen on me learning about how Muggle history has impacted world history. And the way people had to run and hide when Vo – He-who-must-not-be-named was killing everyone makes me think of how everyone in the UK suffered during the Blitz. I guess… it makes a lot of sense for why nobody would want him to come back. But I think that very reason is also why we have to check – So that it really does never happen again. It's better to be wrong a thousand times than to be right once. "

Tony left the office in silence, walking out with a quiet confidence. Umbridge rubbed the bridge of her nose and sighed, trying to dry the remains of her tears. Taking a deep breath to calm her nerves, she glanced at his latest set of lines – the only ones to have been completed correctly. In particular she looked at, the number count in the margins and was left wondering about the strange boy.

It read 500.

- END 4.3 -

Magi-Nation 4.4 (MND, Fused Loop with Guardians of the Galaxy)

Rocket looked over at the guy who was replacing is friend this Loop. "So, you're a pretty good spellcaster, you have a pack of summonable *things* that obey your every command, and you know how to use several ancient magical relics. I think my last question would have to be this: What is your name?"

The wild, blonde-haired Magi grinned. "I am Woot."

- END 4.4 -

Magi-Nation 4.5 (Cartoon)

Sound is bubbly guff,

and the bluffs are

weird and will'd to be

fierce and free.

Thou art not the

frigment of fragments,

but unto the awakening whole,

moving far into the future.

So tread not lightly,

else the dwelling dragon

wakes, unto rage

and lets forth with flame.

Yon buttercup swaying

in th' wind gently

such a breeze comes

from the distant fire.

Lo! The scorched earth

shatters and rises aloft.

Whence shall such a

treasure be returned?

When beauty knows not herself,

and the self that was is nought;

the new self shall be kindled,

and revealed will be

the truth of the world.

Tony face-palmed. "I guess it's going to be a prophecy Loop."

Edyn shrugged. "You have to admit, there are worse things that could happen. You could Loop in as Korg again."

Meanwhile, Strag started sorting select items from his subspace pocket into a local endless bag. "If we are to go on such a journey, I believe that we should prepare for any eventuality."

Edyn blinked at the Shadow Stalker, and then blinked again. "You know, I don't think I've ever seen you so... prepared before." Getting an idea, she clapped her hands gleefully. "Oh! I know, why don't we change our positions! Strag, you can take my role of main spellcaster. Tony takes up your Relic using nature, and I focus on Dream Creatures!"

The other two Final Dreamers glanced at each other, then shrugged. "I suppose it could prove beneficial for future Loops." Strag replied, hoisting his bag over one shoulder.

With that set, the three Loopers walked off into the sunset.

- End 4.5 -

- Interlude: Looper Bar -

Theme: Minor change that crashes a Loop

Tony Jones (MND)

"You know how every Loop has to have that one stupid guy? Well, for us there's this guy called Korg. He's the dumb-as-a-delusional-rock type; anyways, during the normal course of our baseline he has the brilliant idea to try and crush me with a rock. Normally he just ends up squishing his cohort Zet instead."

Tony paused and took a sip of his lemonade. "One time. Just one time he pushed it a little bit to the left, and I got smashed into a paste." Thumping his head on the table, he groaned. "I am NEVER going to live that down."

Yaki (MND)

Yaki laughed. "You think that's embarrassing? One time Poad - that's the local innkeeper for all of you who haven't visited yet - served me some soup made with some new Underneathian mushrooms." He stifled a laugh, trying (and failing) to keep a smile off of his face. "I ended up thinking that a Rabid Wasperine was Pruitt. I tried to kiss it." Wisely, the Core Stalker chose to end his tale there, and took a long dreg of ale.

Tony Jones/Edyn/Strag (Cartoon)

Tony groaned and covered his eyes with a hand. "That's going to be a thing, isn't it?"

Strag nodded. "You must admit, the circumstances that caused the crash were... enlightening, to say the least." This pub didn't seem to serve mushroom grog. At least, not the good kind. And not to Magi who looked like children.

Edyn giggled. "I won't tell you the whole story, but... Orwin made a small mistake when he summoned Tony to the Moonlands. Tony ended up high above the region of Cald." She took a bite of her vegetable flan and swallowed before finishing. "Cald is full of volcanoes."

Strag smirked and leaned back in his chair. "I said it in baseline and I shall say it once more: Lava is hot. Lava is dangerous. Avoid the Lava. Clearly, Tony followed none of those principals."

- End Interlude -

Magi-Nation 4.6 (Cartoon, Fused Loop with Log Horizon)

Tony Awoke to the distinct feeling of a *shift* in planes. Blinking a bit and rubbing his eyes, he glanced around. He seemed to be in a ruined city, and directly in front of him was a large tree. "Wow. Wonder what happened here?" Taking a moment, he perused his Loop Memories. Location? Previously Earth, awaiting the release of the latest expansion for the Elder Tales MMO. Currently an unknown world, which just so happened to be the same world that Elder Tales was set in.

A ping confirmed the presence of two other Loopers, and of course Edyn and Strag would be around somewhere. As for right now? Time to explore this world and meet the locals. This was going to be fun.

- END SNIP -

Magi-Nation 4.7 (MND, Fused Loop with Psychonauts)

Tony Awoke to a short man yelling incredibly loudly on a microphone, and immediately wished that he had just stayed asleep. Six AM was way too early to wake up, in his opinion. Stuffing his pillow on top of his head, the young Magi took a moment to examine his Loop Memories.

"Okay, I'm a Gypsy kid who was raised in the circus, is cursed to die in water, and ran away from home in order to hone his psychic powers. Also, I seem to be convinced that my dad is out to kill me. Or to distract me from using my powers, since I'm obsessed with them."

It was while he was thinking to himself that he became aware of someone staring at him. Lifting the pillow just enough to see, he noticed a short and very pale kid with a tin-foil hat staring at him. "Um… Can I help you?"

The kid just kept staring. Tony decided that trying to converse with the kid was pretty much a lost cause, and turned over, trying to get more sleep.

"You'll be late for Basic Braining." Tony jerked and immediately turned to face the kid again. The kid was still staring at the Magi, but this time it was from the door. "Coach Oleander hates it when people are late for his class. Maybe he'll suck your brain out. Or maybe he'll blow up your head." With that, he headed out the door and off to who-knows where.

Tony just stared. "This isn't going to be pretty, is it?" With a disgruntled sigh, he got up and slid down the ladder next to his bunk. Stretching briefly, he headed outside and was unpleasantly greeted by sunshine straight into his tender, dark-adjusted eyeballs. Blinking in order to get his vision back, he observed that most kids were headed to a near-by tree house. Supposing that he had no other options at this point since nobody else seemed to be awake, he started to trudge over, cursing the sun all the while.

"I wonder who took my place? And how he (or maybe she) is faring right now?"

Raz just stared at the giant brown bear (with antlers! And blue birds!) that had magically appeared from a hunk of crystal. "Please tell me that you aren't going to grab me with telekinesis and then hit me painfully." All the bear did was blink.

- END SNIP -